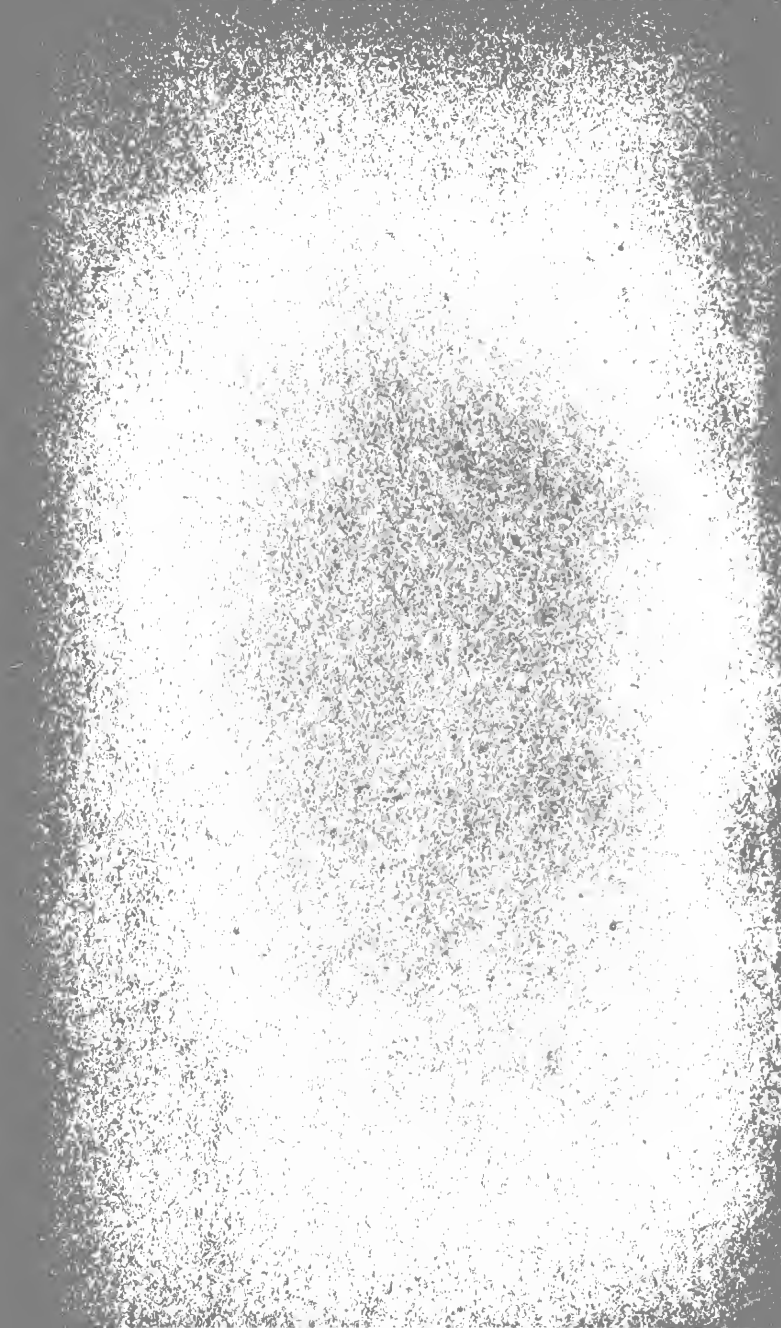




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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT.

VOL. III.

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MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT

BY

JAMES GRANT

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"THE ROMANCE OF WAR," "THE CAMERONIANS,"
"THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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APPENDIX TO VOLUME
OF THE CALIFORNIA STATE

MISS CHEYNE OF ESSILMONT.

CHAPTER I.

THE BATTLE OF AMOAFUL.

THE firing proved a mistake—the result of a false alarm—so the night passed without any other *alerte* or disturbance, and all remained quiet during the temporary halt at Prahsu; but the troops heard of many strange things as occurring at Coomassie, all deemed by the natives portentous of its coming fate.

In its market-place—that scene of daily blood and murder—where the predecessor of King Koffee devoted three thousand victims ‘to water the grave’ of his mother—an *aërolite* fell, to the terror of the

people ; but there came still a greater prodigy. A child was born which instantly began to converse, and, to prevent it having intercourse with supernatural visitors, it was placed alone in a room under guards, who in the morning found that it had vanished, and that nothing lay in its place but a bundle of withered bones ; and on this the fetishmen argued ‘that Coomassie itself would pass away, and nothing remain thereof but dead leaves ;’ and on the same day and hour that Lieutenant Grant of the 6th—the first white man—crossed the Prah, there sprang up a mighty tornado, that levelled the great tree under which the king used to sit, surrounded by his warriors.

This caused a profound sensation among the Ashantees, who gathered by thousands around it in the market-place, which at that time was described by one who saw it as ‘a den of reeking corpses, shrieking and tortured victims—men and women butchered by hundreds—where skulls and human

bones lay about as oyster-shells do at home !

By order of the king's fetishmen two prisoners had knives run through their cheeks, and were tied up in the woods to die, as a test of whether our invasion would be successful. The idea of the fetishmen was that, if the victims died soon, all would be well with Ashantee ; but they lived, one for four and the other for nine days—so the nation gave itself over for lost.

On the 6th of January—the day the fetish-tree fell—we shed the first blood in that land of horrors, when Lord Gifford, at the head of fifty men, captured a village occupied by an Ashantee outpost, and killed many of its defenders.

And so, till the forward movement began, the troops were impatient during the halt at Prahsu, the soldiers making wry faces at their daily doses of quinine, and still more so at their weak ration of grog—only half a gill per man, or a gallon of rum to sixty-four men—and the officers missing sorely

the pleasures of the long, glittering, flower-laden mess-table, and the charms of the girls they had left behind them, and of whom they were reminded by Du Maurier in some old stray numbers of our friend Mr. *Punch*.

After the troops advanced, the 25th of January saw our posts pushed as far forward as the Bahrien river, and a slight brush which they had there with the Ashantees showed that they were making vigorous efforts to concentrate their forces for a fierce resistance; and on the 31st was fought the battle of Amoaful, which took place in the morning, and by eight o'clock the white smoke of the musketry and the red flashes of the latter, were spouting in every direction, amid the dark green and wondrous leafy luxuriance of the bushy jungles.

The Rifles were in the reserve, 580 strong, under Colonel Warren. Thus Dalton, Jerry, and others were for a time almost specta-

tors while the fight went on, and the leading column—consisting of the Black Watch, eighty of the Welsh Fusiliers, and two rifled guns, led by Sir Archibald Alison (son of the historian), extending as it advanced with loud cheers at a quick run—attacked, before the rest of the troops came up, the village of Egginassie, upon the slope of the hill that rises to Amoaful.

Prominent amid the greenery could be seen the red tufts on their tropical helmets, then the representation of their famous historical scarlet plumes.

The firing here was tremendous, so much so that all sound of individual reports was lost, and the din of the conflict became one hoarse roar. The enemy used slugs, not bullets. Had it been otherwise, not a man of the Black Watch—many of whom were severely hit—would have remained to tell the tale. Major Macpherson (young Cluny) was wounded in several places, but remained under fire, propped upon a stick.

In five minutes a hundred and five Highlanders, nine being officers, had blood pouring from their wounds; but 'Onward' was the cry, and as the Rifles came up in support, amid the ceaseless clatter of the breechloaders, 'for three hours after the Scottish and Welsh infantry had carried the village,' says the *Daily Telegraph*, 'the contest was obstinately maintained in the jungle, where it was difficult to see or reach the enemy, and quite as hard for him to know how the fight went upon other points. Assailed in their own wilderness, followed up foot by foot, the Ashantees fought well, but never gave a fair opportunity for the shock of a real charge.'

As the Rifles advanced through the jungle in extended order, over ground which the fire of the 42nd had strewed with killed and wounded Ashantees, 'one of the latter, a colossal black savage, clad only with a middle cloth and string of beads, propping himself upon his elbow, shot Jerry's servant

O'Farrel, in the back and killed him on the spot, as the ball passed through his heart.

It was, perhaps, the last effort of expiring nature ; but Jerry responded promptly with his revolver, and sent a bullet whistling through the brain of the Ashantee, who, as he was a man of fine proportions, was soon after eaten by the Kossos or wild cannibals of Colonel Wood's regiment, who, as Jerry said, 'felt peckish' after the fight.

A Highlander lost himself in the bush, and came suddenly upon a cluster of retiring Ashantees, who shot him down by a volley and instantly cut off his head, which they carried away, as no trophy is more prized by this people than human heads, which formed the chief ornaments of the king's palace, and even of his bed-chamber in Coomassie.

In the first days of February the passage of the Ordah followed, and on the night the troops bivouacked by its shore they were without tents, and the rain fell in merciless torrents, as if the windows of the sky had

opened again, while thunder bellowed in the echoing woods, and green forked lightning lit up incessantly the bosom of the foaming river ; yet more than ever were our troops anxious when day broke to begin the weary march—to reach Coomassie and grapple with the dusky enemy.

The first human blood Jerry Wilmot had ever shed was when he pistoled the Ashantee who murdered—for murder it was—poor O'Farrel. He had handled his revolver then promptly, if mechanically, and thought afterwards—strange to say—with a little sense of disgust over the episode, and the aspect of the dead negro, his yellow eye-balls turned back within their sockets, his fallen jaw, and oozing brain, had actually haunted him.

But since then, in skirmishing, both in the bush and open, Jerry had, as he phrased it, 'potted three or four more of the beggars,' as coolly as if they had been black-cocks on a Highland moor.

While the Naval Brigade halted at Ordashu, the Black Watch, with half a battalion of the Rifles, pushed on towards Coomassie.

Soon tidings came from Sir Archibald Alison, saying briefly,

‘ We have taken all the villages, but the last, before entering Coomassie ; support me with the Rifles, and I hope to enter it to-night.’

Fortunately he had been anticipated : the half battalion was close upon his own, and with it were Dalton and Wilmot.

The slugs were coming out of the bush as thick as hail, and the advance of the Highlanders and Rifles along the road that led to Coomassie was in a form never before seen in war. Colonel M’Leod led the former:

Along the well-ambushed road they proceeded quietly and steadily, as if upon parade, but by two abreast in file, so narrow was the forest path.

‘Forty-Second, fire by successive companies—front rank to the right, rear rank to the left,’ shouted Colonel M’Leod.

‘A company—front rank, present ! rear rank, present !’

‘So on,’ says the correspondent of the *New York Herald*, ‘and thus vomiting bullets two score to the right and two score to the left, the companies volleyed and thundered as they marched past the ambuscades, the bag-pipes playing, the cheers rising from the throats of the lusty Scots, till the forest rung again with the discordant medley of musketry, bag-pipe music, and vocal sounds. Rait’s artillery now and then gave tongue with an emphasis and result which must have recalled to the Ashantees memories of the bloody field of Amoaful, where Captain Rait and his subalterns, Knox and Saunders, signalised themselves so conspicuously. But it was the audacious spirit and true military bearing on the part of the Highlanders, as they moved down

the road to Coomassie, which challenged admiration this day.'

So great was the roar of musketry in the echoing woods that, scared by the terrible and unusual sound, the very birds of the air—and brightly plumaged birds they were—grovelled in terror, with outspread wings over the dying and the dead.

Many were borne rearward disfigured for life and frightfully wounded by the missiles of their hidden antagonists; but the regiment never halted—the Rifles following close—nor wavered, but moved steadily on with its national music playing, until the Ashantees, conceiving it to be useless to continue against men who advanced thus, heedless of all ambuscades, rose from their coverts and fled in yelling hordes towards Coomassie.

'The cool, calm commands of Colonel M'Leod,' says Mr. Stanley, whom we cannot help quoting, 'had a marvellous effect on the Highland battalion—so much so that

the conduct of all other white regiments pales before that of the 42nd.' Frequently during the hot and rapid march to Coomassie the Highlanders saw emerging from the bushes several scores of fugitives, who found their movements accelerated by the volleys they received on such occasions. Village after village along the road heard the disastrous tidings which the fugitives conveyed, and long before the Highlanders approached the place where the king remained during the battle, he had decamped because of these reports.

King Koffee never for a moment anticipated a complete defeat, and believed that he would only fall back in good order to give us battle at the head of all his warriors in front of Coomassie itself, and thus obtain a peace which would at least spare his palace—on which he set a great store—from destruction.

When Sir Garnet Wolseley, with the main body, was drawing near that place, he

received another despatch from the front. Sir Archibald Alison wrote to say that he had given some time to treat.

Thus a delay occurred in consequence, and of this delay the circumstances are not very clear to the outer world. It does not appear from some accounts to have been Sir Garnet's wish, yet it undoubtedly took place, and put the troops to some inconvenience by allowing night to fall before they entered the place.

'Coomassie at last!' exclaimed Dalton, as he threw himself, panting with heat, among the luxuriant grass that bordered the now bloody and corpse-strewn pathway. 'Let us but take it, lay it in ashes, and then hey for home!' he added, hopefully. Yet he had had two narrow escapes; one ball had knocked off his helmet, and another had scarred his left cheek.

'Yes, hey for home,' said Jerry, proffering his cigar-case; but poor Dalton little knew all that had to be dared and done

before he saw the last of Coomassie !

All knew that when the final attack was made there would be a fierce resistance to encounter—a great slaughter pretty certain to ensue—no quarter given or taken ; and, like several others in the corps, during the unexpected halt, Dalton and Jerry were writing what might prove to each a last letter to those they loved at home ; and as the former wrote there came curiously and persistently to memory the last verse of the song Laura was wont to sing to him of old :

‘Then think of me ! for withered lies
The dearest hope I nursed ;
And I have seen, with bitter sighs,
My brightest dream dispersed.’

Is it strange that, after the peculiar manner of their parting, Jerry’s first and longest letter was not to his mother, but to Bella Chevenix ?

‘Poor Bella !’ said he, in a broken voice, almost to himself, as he closed the epistle.

‘You did not part on bad terms ?’ asked Dalton.

‘No, thank God! What made you think so?’

‘Something in your tone.’

‘I am writing to her, though she gave me no hope.’

‘No hope—*you*—why?’

‘She quite misunderstands the real love I bear her, and evidently suspects that I wish to secure her hand, not because I am the squire of Wilmothurst, but because she is in reality the heiress of it.’

‘She—what riddle is this?’ asked Dalton, taking the cigar from his lips, and eyeing his friend.

‘Did I not make you understand all that before, old fellow?’

‘Not quite.’

‘Well, old Chevenix has no end of mortgages over my inheritance—it is well nigh all his property now; I can’t even pay the interest—the mater cannot realise how heavily the old place is burdened, and what a task my father had to keep it to-

gether—so times there are when I don't care if I should be knocked on the head—bowled out here.'

'Don't talk that way, Jerry,' said the older man, reprehensively; 'death is too close to be lightly spoken of thus.'

Death was indeed closer than either perhaps thought.

'But there is your mother,' urged Dalton, after a pause.

'She! It wouldn't break her "noble" heart, even were it so with me, and I were lying stiff, as hundreds are now, in yonder bush,' replied Jerry, with an irrepressible gust of bitterness, as he snipped the end off a cigar with his teeth, and, lighting it, proceeded to smoke, silently and sorrowfully, while re-charging his revolver for the coming attack; 'though, if we are to believe the newspapers, the grief of the "upper ten," like that of royalty, is something unfathomable as compared with that of any of the vulgar herd!'

CHAPTER II.

THE SCARABÆUS.

BEFORE the troops, on the side of a large, rocky hill, and in the red fiery light of the setting sun, setting in a sky where it flamed like a vast crimson globe amid an orange and amber space that blended into green and blue overhead, lay Coomassie, with all its long spacious streets of wigwam-like houses, built of wattlework and mud, plastered and washed with white clay, ornamented with rows of beautiful banyan trees, and having before the door of each dwelling a special tree, at the foot of which were placed idols, calabashes, and human bones, as fetishes for protection against evil.

It was four miles in circumference, and its most important edifice was the palace from which King Koffee had fled—a central stone building of European architecture, in the chief thoroughfare, so spacious that it included two or three small streets, besides piazzas for the royal recreation, with arcades of bamboo, the bases of which were ornamented with elegant trellis work of an Egyptian character. The accommodation was most ample, as befitted a monarch whom the State required to possess 3333 wives.

‘There go the bugles at last, Dalton!’ shouted Jerry, cheerfully, as he sprang up and drew his sword, when the *advance* was sounded, just as the sun went down, and the troops began to approach this terrible place, through ground the atmosphere of which was made appalling by the awful stench from exposed corpses which lay about in every direction, and over which great vultures flapped their wings—the dead of past days of local slaughter for

various royal reasons; thus it was dark when the 42d and the Rifles reached the edge of the swamp which nearly surrounds the place—on three sides at least—that horrible and pestilential swamp, with floating bones and the rotting flesh of the victims.

The first man through it, and actually in Coomassie, was young Lord Gifford, who led the way with his scouts till he was wounded, when the enemy opened fire for a time; but as the king had fled with his warriors, the resistance was merely nominal, and tremendously hearty was the cheer of the 42d as they entered the place, and the pipes sent up a skirl of triumph, which announced that fact to all the troops who were coming on.

Excitement over now, Jerry Wilmot felt his soul sicken as he marched at the head of his company up one of the principal streets, with the awful odour of dead flesh everywhere around—victims never being

buried, but left where they were killed, or cast into the adjacent swamp. Over all that town, as a writer has it, the odour of death hung everywhere, and came on every sickly breath of hot wind—‘a town where here and there a vulture hops at one’s very feet, too gorged to join the filthy flock, preening itself on the gaunt dead trunks that line the way ; where blood is plastered like a pitch coating over trees, floors and stools—blood of a thousand (fetish) victims yearly renewed ; where headless bodies make common sport ; where murder pure and simple—the monotonous massacre of bound men—is the one employment of the king and the one spectacle of the populace.’

Amid such surroundings the troops piled arms in the market-place, guards were posted, and the rest sat down to their rations, amid the light from blazing houses, which the native levies began to loot and then set aflame ; while many Ashantee warriors, who had been but recently fighting with our

men, lingered near the groups quietly, with their muskets in their hands, saying ever and anon, 'Tank you, tank you'—an attempt at the only English they knew.

The Fantee prisoners the troops had come so far to release were found chained to logs ; and one European, an Englishman, who was found free, displayed like them the most extravagant joy on finding himself saved from death at the hands of King Koffee.

'Is there a drop in your flask, Dalton ?' said an officer, propping himself on his sword. 'The odour here is literally awful.'

'You are welcome to what remains, but a strong cigar is best, my boy,' replied Dalton, as he wrenched open a tin of preserved meat with the blade of his sword.

'Now that we are here,' said Jerry, 'what will the next move be ?'

'Burn the whole place, no doubt, and then be off like birds,' was the reply of more than one.

‘And so end the most hideous and uninteresting war in which British soldiers have been engaged.’

‘What the devil is that? Trundle it out of sight,’ cried Jerry to a rifleman, who was dragging near them an object which he had found, and which proved to be one of the king’s war-drums, ornamented with sixteen human skulls and thirty-two thigh bones, and in the cords of which were stuck three war-trumpets, made each to imitate a throat, with a tongue of red cloth, and jaws but too real to form the mouthpiece. ‘Take away the d——d thing! Who could sup with that beside them?’ exclaimed Jerry, in great disgust, as the soldier laughed, saluted, and dragged away the ghastly trophy, on the resounding head of which some of his comrades were ere long beating while they sang some familiar music-hall ditty.

As it was expected that King Koffee might still come to terms, his capital was not yet given to the flames. Indeed, he

had sent messengers to Sir Garnet Wolseley with missives to the effect that he would be early with him next day and arrange for peace; but the morning of the next day passed and noon without any sign of his coming, though the general and staff were in readiness to receive him, and all were restless and uneasy, as it was impossible to linger long in such a vast charnel-house as Coomassie.

A dreadful tempest of rain made the adjacent country a swamp, giving a hint that the fatal and pestilential wet season was at hand, and the words, 'We must be off,' were in everyone's mouth.

When five o'clock on that day came, and there were no tidings from King Koffee—now that he had betaken himself into the interior, thus proving himself unworthy of trust—it was resolved to leave marks of our power and vengeance that would never be forgotten.

The troops knew that the streams in their

rear would be swollen, that the mere runnels in the ravines would soon become brawling torrents, so there was no time to be lost in getting back to the coast, where the ships awaited the army, which had only five days' provisions, so it was requisite that the campaign should end sharply, surely, and sternly.

The royal state umbrella and various gold ornaments were taken as presents for the Queen from the palace, in which the Highlanders were much exercised in their minds to find, framed upon the wall of a room, an engraving of 'Burns and Highland Mary' beside a bird organ, and various old clocks, pots, and kettles; stools wet with the blood of recent human victims, the royal couch garnished with human skulls—and skulls, indeed, adorned most of the rooms, the floors of which were full of graves. In fact, the whole palace, as Mr. Henty wrote, appeared to be little better than a cemetery, though in its cellars were found bottles of

brandy, palm wine, and even champagne, which the discoverers thereof were not slow to fully appreciate, and drain off to 'The girls we've left behind us.'

At last orders were given that the palace was to be blown up, the whole town reduced to ashes, and a start was to be made for the sea; then the five past days of continued toil and incessant fighting were forgotten, and every heart beat happily and every bronzed face grew bright.

On the day the Engineers began to mine the palace, Dalton and Jerry Wilmot paid it a visit, and the latter made very merry about the three thousand three hundred and thirty-three wives of the fugitive king.

Unluckily for them both, the former saw a gold *scarabæus*, about the size of a goose-egg, among the many strange ornaments at the head of the king's bed, and with some force contrived to wrench it off, saying to Tony as he did so, 'An article of *bijoutrie* for Laura's boudoir—a souvenir of Coomassie!'

The words were hardly out of his mouth when two tall and powerful savages, who had been quietly—if sullenly and resentfully—watching the ‘looting’ of much royal paraphernalia and rubbish by officers and men, threw themselves upon him with yells, while brandishing long straight daggers that were minus guards or proper hilts, and who wore each at his neck a human jaw, polished clean and white, as a kind of order of valour perhaps.

Gesticulating violently, they seemed to demand the surrender of the *scarabæus*, which proved eventually to be a famous fetish—famous even as the skull of the murdered Sir Charles MacCarthy, which the king had carried off with him as the chief palladium of Ashantee.

Fortunately Dalton had his sword in his hand, and kept them at bay till they were expelled at the bayonet point by some of the Royal Engineers, but when he and Jerry came forth they were conscious that these

two Ashantees with the jaw-bones were watching them and dogging their footsteps, and were menacing them ; but anon they slunk away when Dalton put his hand to his revolver case.

Then they re-appeared again and again to his great annoyance and irritation.

‘ This looks ill,’ said Jerry ; ‘ it is some state fetish. Throw the confounded thing away. Chuck it at their woolly heads ere worse comes of it.’

‘ What can come of it ?’ asked Dalton.

‘ Your assassination or mine before we reach the coast, perhaps.’

‘ As for their menaces,’ said Dalton, laughing, ‘ I value them as little as an old troop horse might a pistol-shot.’

But not long after he had cause to regret not taking Jerry’s advice.

In a wattle-built house, of which they had taken possession merely as a shelter from the heat of the sun by day and the baleful dew by night, the two friends were partak-

ing of a kind of 'tiffin' of tinned beef and biscuits, with a glass of grog, before the march, when, at an opening which served as a window, they became suddenly conscious of two woolly heads and two dark faces, the gleaming eyes of which were stealthily watching them, but vanished the moment Dalton started up.

'Look here, Dalton,' said Jerry, 'I don't like this business at all. I am not a timid fellow, nor a very thoughtful one perhaps, but I have an unpleasant presentiment that there is more in this matter than you think.'

'More in what?' asked Dalton, testily.

'This confounded gold beetle that you've bagged. Perhaps it is brass.'

'Not at all. Well?'

'It is said to be some great fetish, and you may be followed, tracked to the bitter end—to Cape Coast, for all I know—till it is recaptured, or you, perhaps, made away with. You remember the story of the "Moonstone," published about ten years ago,

and how the possessor of it was followed about till it was re-won ?’

‘ Pshaw !—that was in a novel.’

‘ And this is reality. Novels are supposed to represent real life.’

‘ There go the bugles ; the advance guard is falling in,’ said Dalton, as he put the gold *scarabæus* in his haversack, and they hurried forth.

At six o’clock in the evening the advanced guard moved off, and the main body followed in the dusk, about an hour after. The Black Watch remained as a rear-guard to cover the Engineers and burning party, which consisted of about a hundred men of the latter corps.

Furnished with palm-leaf torches, they began the work of stern and deliberate destruction, and, although grave fears were expressed that the late tempests of rain would prevent the streets of thatch and wood from burning, ere long the retiring troops saw, with cheers, mighty volumes of

smoke rolling from end to end of Coomasie, and there was but one regret expressed, that the flames did not consume the Bantama (or burial-place of the kings), with the temples of their hideous and atrocious paganism, made terrible by the gore of a myriad human victims.

The pipers struck up, and merrily the Highlanders began their homeward march, after the officer commanding the Engineers had reported the total destruction of the palace, which he mined at four corners, and brought down like a house of cards.

Around it all was in flames, and, owing to the dampness of the materials of which the town was built, astounding were the columns, vast and dense, of black smoke that rolled, not only over the whole site of Coomassie, but the adjacent country, while ever and anon clear, bright pyramids of flames shot skyward as the retiring troops toiled round the margin of the corpse-strewn swamp on their homeward way, with their

arms at 'the slope,' as all were loaded.

And so the dire portents of the fetish-men, that Coomassie—the City of the Tree—would pass away, and nothing remain of it but dead leaves, were being realised to the fullest extent.

From the nature of the narrow path, the country through which it lay, and the obscurity caused by the smoke enveloping the scenery, the march of the troops was of a somewhat straggling nature, and proved a terrible one. They had barely proceeded a hundred yards before they had every reason to rejoice that the rains so greatly dreaded had not set in three days earlier than they did.

In some parts through which the line of march lay, the district had become an entire morass, and in one place, through which—in advancing—they had passed nearly dry-shod there was a sheet of water nearly five hundred yards broad, and in another, over which a narrow wooden bridge had been

thrown, there was a depth of six feet. 'So King Koffee had calculated on these spring rains, as the Emperor Nicholas did on the winter snows, to destroy our troops; but, happily, both calculated in vain.'

It was during the straggling march, caused by some of these obstructions, that the catastrophe we have to narrate took place.

Again the troops were at times marching almost in file, and in rear of the last company of Rifles were the two friends, Jerry and Dalton, and, leaving their men to be led by their senior subalterns, they paced on together, laughing from time to time, and talking of home and those who awaited them there, now that the brief campaign was over, for homeward now went the thoughts of all; but these two were unaware that their steps were dogged and watched surely and stealthily.

As they made a little detour to avoid a more than usually deep pool surrounded by some straggling palm-trees, they suddenly

found themselves face to face with at least a dozen of Ashantees—notably two of them the fellows with the jawbones. They seemed to have sprung out of the earth, so suddenly did they appear amid the eddying smoke and misty vapour; and they at once struck Dalton down before he could utter a word.

Jerry instantly shot three in quick succession with his revolver, and, knowing the reports would at once summon succour, he shouted cheerily, and dragged Dalton to his feet, but at the same moment was struck down senseless by a tremendous blow on the head, and falling—falling, he knew not where—remembered no more . . .

In short, he had tumbled into a species of nullah or hollow, completely fringed round with enormous boughs and luxuriant greenery, where he lay hidden and undiscovered by the riflemen whom his pistol-shots summoned, and who searched the whole vicinity in vain, till they could

delay no longer, as the waters were rising fast. They carried off with them Dalton, who was severely wounded by dagger-blades, and whose haversack had been cut away, and taken, and with it, of course, the unlucky *scarabæus*.

And so, while poor Jerry lay where we have described, the army pushed on its homeward way, and ere long found the obstructions increase as the night advanced. Where there had been a small stream at one place the water was three hundred yards wide and five feet deep. With great toil the Engineers bridged this by felling a huge tree, over which the white troops defiled slowly, while the carriers and others had to splash their way through as best they could, and many of the shorter men disappeared under the surface more than once.

A worse obstruction still was encountered at Ordah, where the water had risen two feet above the bridge built by the Engineers,

and was more than five feet deep in the mid-channel, and there the shorter men had all to be assisted by their comrades who could swim. Another day crept on, and by five o'clock in the afternoon the whole of the white troops had succeeded in crossing the half-hidden bridge; but darkness was coming on, the river was rising fast, and for all they knew the Ashantees, infuriated by the destruction of Coomassie, might be pouring in wild hordes upon their rear!

Dalton's wounds had been dressed, but ere that was done he had lost so much blood that his chances of recovery seemed very precarious; and meanwhile how fared Jerry Wilmot?

When he struggled back to consciousness, and half raised himself out of the place in which he lay by grasping the branch of a bush, he found himself alone, and surrounded by dead silence. Not a sound fell on his ear, and at a little distance he could see the red smouldering flames of

Coomassie. But where were the troops?

‘Oh, God, help me!’ he wailed out.
‘Gone—gone, and I am left alone and helpless behind them!’

There was a gleam of moonlight now, and after several futile efforts, for his senses reeled like those of one intoxicated, he made out the hour on his watch.

‘Midnight—and they have been six hours on the march!’

He had been in a state of semi-unconsciousness for some two hours. The sense—the conviction that he must instantly do something—attempt to overtake them, made him struggle up desperately, feebly, and half blinded in his own blood.

‘Oh, Lord,’ thought Jerry, ‘I shall lose the little reason I have left! Why did Dalton covet that infernal beetle!’

Alone—alone at Coomassie. Was not this some horrible nightmare, and not a reality, crushing and bewildering? for but two fates seemed to await him. If he did

not die of hunger in the wilderness, he would be sure to be tracked and taken; and then, if not killed at once, he would be doomed to a lingering death by torture in Coomassie, or what remained of it—tortures such as devils alone could devise.

He made an attempt to stand, but all power of volition seemed to have left him; he fell again into the leafy hollow, and for a time remembered no more.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOST ONE.

AND where all this time was Alison Cheyne, after whom—as the chief of our *dramatis personæ*—we must needs look now?

When consciousness returned to her, after wildly grasping the bell in the porte-cochère of a large house on that night of snow and terror, and when, fluttering, her white eyelids unclosed, after what seemed a long sleep, she looked round her like a little scared bird, in utter bewilderment, and, believing that she was dreaming, closed them again.

A bell ringing at a distance roused her, and she looked again, and became convinced

that what she looked on was no dream, and her eyes wandered about with a dazed expression.

She was in a little room, with whitewashed walls, and a floor of plain polished wood, on which lay a tiny patch of faded carpet. The sunbeams were creeping through the closed blinds, and a fire burned cheerfully in a little black iron stove. She lay in a pretty bed, with the softest of pillows and sheets; it was of plain iron, and without curtains.

Above the mantelpiece, in a simple frame, hung an engraving from Rubens' picture of 'St. Theresa interceding for the Souls in Purgatory,' the three principal souls being—in a spirit of waggery—faithful portraits of the artist's three wives. On one side of this was a little Madonna on a bracket, with a red crystal lamp hung before it; on the other a crucifix, below which was a tiny font of Antwerp china.

Other ornaments—save a few flowers in

a vase—the apartment had none, and its furniture—two cane-seated chairs and a deal table—was of the simplest kind.

In one of the chairs sat a young woman dressed like a nun, with a black robe and white hood, a large bronze crucifix and wooden beads at her cord girdle ; her down-cast face had a sweet, placid, and even beautiful expression, and she was sedulously working, with the whitest of hands, at a large piece of gold embroidery on cloth of silver—a portion of a priest's vestments apparently, while glancing attentively from time to time down on her patient or up at two pretty little love-birds in a brass cage.

Alison took in all these details at one rapid glance, and great terror seized her that something strange had befallen her, that she was in the care of a nursing sister.

‘Where am I?’ she said, faintly.

‘Thank heaven, you speak, and rationally at last,’ said her attendant, casting aside her embroidery and coming softly to her side,

laid her cool hand gently on Alison's forehead. 'Pauvre enfant ! pauvre enfant !' she repeated, caressingly.

'But *where* am I, and *who* are you?' asked Alison, in a weak but impatient manner.

'I am Sister Lisette, and you are safe, safe with friends, and ere long your own people will soon be here to inquire for you.'

'My friends,' she murmured, with a puzzled expression, as her thoughts now went back to her father's sick-room in the Hôtel St. Antoine ; to Cadbury, at the thought of which she shivered ; to the Bal Masqué at the theatre ; the Café au Progrés, and the insolence of 'Captain Smith ;' her flight through the snowy streets ; her fall at the door of a house, the nature of which she knew not ; all these things floated dimly and dreamily before her now, though they seemed to have happened but a few hours ago.

‘How fortunate that you had the power to ring our bell before you fainted, child,’ said the nun, caressing her and kissing her cheek. ‘You might have died in the snow otherwise.’

‘Last night?’

‘No—child—it was several nights ago.’

‘Several?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, papa, papa! has he been here?’ cried Alison, feebly, in great anguish of mind, yet unable from weakness to raise her head from the pillow.

‘No, for doubtless he knew not where you were.’

‘Oh, he will be dead—dead with terror!’ wailed Alison. ‘Am I in a hospital?’

‘No, child, in my house,’ said the nun, sweetly.

‘Your house?’ queried Alison, with very open eyes.

‘In the Beguinage, in the Rue Rouge.’

Thus it was that both Sir Ranald and

Lord Cadbury had utterly failed to trace her, and fortunate it was indeed for Alison that she had fallen into such good hands as those of the Beguines, who are a religious order, altogether peculiar to Belgium, each nun having a private residence of her own within the general enclosure.

The clatter of the ponderous bell, as the pull left her hand, had soon brought aid to her. She was denuded of her wet and sodden attire, put to bed in the little mansion occupied by Sister Lisette, and, before the angelus bell rang in the chapel next forenoon, she was in a highly feverish state, and in a delirium which lasted several nights and days, with intermissions of fretful sleep, during all of which time nothing coherent could be gleaned from her as to her name, or where she resided, whence she came, and how it was that she was abroad in the streets alone and in such a night.

Her little ravings led them to know that she was English ; her costume, and the deli-

cacy and beauty of her person, that she was undoubtedly a lady ; but, save a ring or two, she had no purse, card-case, or aught to indicate who she was ; but the name of ' Alison ' worked upon some of her clothing at once interested deeply Sister Lisette, who was also an Alison, but adopted the French diminutive of it.

The poor Beguines were quite uncertain what else they could do with her, but keep her till she grew well enough to be questioned ; so she remained there in her little iron bed, tended by Lisette, unconscious and fever-stricken, while the lengthening days passed slowly over her aching head.

Nearly a fortnight passed before she began mentally to drift back to consciousness, so terribly had all she had undergone of late—the collision at sea with the *Black Hound* of Ostend, the nursing of her querulous father, her separation from Bevil Goring, and the worry incident to Cadbury's wooing, culminating in that night of

terror in the streets—told upon her sensitive nature and delicate frame.

A sweet picture she made, in her little white bed in the plain bare room of the kind Beguine, who never left her even for prayers, but said them by her side on her knees when the angelus or elevation bells rang. Among the huge, soft pillows the slight figure of Alison was half buried, yet the soft tints of her face and hair came out in a species of relief from them; the former was pale—very pale—and there were dark circles under the eyes; and the gentle young Beguine who watched her thought she had never looked on anyone so lovely, and often sat on a tabourette at the side of the couch, keeping her hand caressingly within her own, and counting the jewels in her rings one by one as a child might have done.

‘She has a gentle expression in her eyes, such as I have often seen in those of a *Sœur de Charité*, and other nursing sisters,’ was the dictum of the reverend mother of the

establishment, who came from time to time to visit the fair waif who had been so suddenly cast upon their tenderness ; and, truth to tell, there was a great touch of melancholy about the eyes and features of Alison Cheyne now, though certainly melancholy was by no means one of her characteristics naturally.

The Beguines, we have said, are a religious order peculiar to Belgium, and totally unlike any other in so far that they are bound by no vows ; they may return to the world whenever they please ; but it is their boast that no sister has ever been known to quit the order after having once entered it. They attend to the sick in the Beguinage, and frequently go out as nurses in the hospitals.

They were among the few religious communities not suppressed by Joseph II. or swept away by the furious torrent of the French Revolution. Each Beguinage—more especially in Ghent, where the sister-

hood averages six hundred in number—is a species of little town by itself, with streets and squares, having gates, and sometimes surrounded by a moat as well as a wall, especially at Bruges.

The sisters live generally in separate houses, on the doors of which are inscribed, not the name of the occupant, but of some saint adopted as her patron or protectress; and many of them are persons of rank and wealth; hence it was in the private house of Sister Lisette that Alison found herself now.

Many writers ascribe the institution of the Beguines to St. Begga, widow and abbess, daughter of Pepin of Landen, whose husband, mayor of the palace, was killed while hunting, after which she dedicated herself to a penitential state of retirement, and built seven chapels on the Meuse, in imitation of the seven great churches of Rome; and, according to the martyrology, she died so long ago as 698.

Others assert that the Beguines were founded by Lambert de Begue or Balbus, a pious priest, of Liege, in 1170, and derive their name from him; but all this lies apart from our story. Suffice it that, fortunately for herself, it was in the spacious Beguinage of Antwerp that Alison found succour, shelter, and protection.

Alison had often seen nuns, but never spoken to or been intimate with one before, and, as all she knew of such recluses was derived through the medium of novels and romances, when strength returned to her she began to invest Sister Lisette with the halo of fiction, and to suppose that she must have some story—that a lost lover or a broken heart accounted for her sweet sadness of face and her present vocation; and she was nearer the truth in her guess than she imagined, for Sister Lisette had once been—for a brief time—a happy wife, of which more anon; and when Alison grew stronger, and was taken

as far as the chapel, she was greatly impressed by all she saw and heard there at vesper time, though the chanting of female voices only—some of them from a age far from melodious—was pleasing, and the sight of such a large assemblage of recluses in black robes with white veils—the ancient Flemish *faillie*, which they yet retain—dimly illuminated by a few votive lamps, had a strange, weird, and, to her eyes, mysterious effect.

The novices are distinguished by a different costume, and those who have just taken the veil wear a chaplet round their heads.

But in all this we are anticipating, for at present Alison was weak as a child, and prostrate with the effect of the short, sharp fever that had left her, though it was apparent to those who watched her that the lines of her face were fine, and they could see that, when well and happy, she must look very beautiful.

In Sister Lisette Alison found an able nurse, for she had served as one in the German war under the Red Cross ; her soft, white hand had dressed many a ghastly wound and closed many a glazing eye, and often amid the horrors of Sedan and elsewhere the heads of the dying had rested on her bosom, and with low, loving words she had soothed their moments of death and agony—words that were sometimes taken for those of mother, or wife, or some young love that was far, far away.

Sister Lisette seemed about five-and-twenty years of age ; her face was delicately fair, but the rich tint of her lips and the peach-like bloom of her cheeks relieved it of all paleness. Her features were small and regular, but very soft in their lines, and, at times, a singular sadness stole over them.

Her eyes were of the clearest and darkest hazel, and full of ‘soul’s light,’ imparted to her face a world of expression ; but

what the colour of her hair (or what remained of it) was, it would be impossible to say, as every vestige of it was closely hidden by her tightly-fitting white wimple.

‘And I have been here for days and nights ill,’ said Alison, faintly, as consciousness came fully back to her, and Lisette, while propping her pretty head upon her own breast, gave her soothing drink. ‘Oh, what a trouble I must have been to you !’

‘No trouble at all, *ma sœur*,’ replied the other, letting her head tenderly down on the pillow, and smoothing out the latter.

‘So long, so long, and without papa being informed,’ exclaimed Alison, as tears of dismay started to her eyes.

‘Child, we know not his name—his address—even of his existence.’

Alison sighed deeply. She was too prostrate in body and even mind to regard anything as very extraordinary, even her unusual surroundings in the convent; yet she longed for her father to come to her, or to

have tidings of him ; of aught else she said nothing.

‘ Oh, if I should die without seeing papa again !’ said she, wringing her hands.

‘ One can die but once,’ said Sister Lisette, placidly. ‘ You are too strong and too young to die, though those who die are sometimes better off than those who are left in the world. You, at least, have all your life to look forward to.’

‘ And you ?’

‘ Mine is ended.’

‘ Ended !’

‘ In the world at least, as I shall go back to it no more.’

Seeing that Alison was in a fever of impatience to hear tidings of her father, Sister Lisette, on obtaining his name and address at the Hôtel St. Antoine, at once sent a messenger with that letter which, as we have described, so greatly startled and agitated the old man ; and Alison remained in a fever of impatience, awaiting the return of

that messenger who might perhaps bring her very crushing tidings.

‘Dearest papa will not lose a moment in coming to me,’ she murmured, partly to her nurse and partly to herself; but how, if he were too weak to come or in despair at her loss had left Antwerp, or perhaps—oh Heavens!—have sunk under it, and—died! And to see him again would be, of course, to see that odious Lord Cadbury; and so she tormented herself till the messenger returned with tidings that her father was well and had been out and about for days, despairingly searching for her, and would be with her very soon.

‘Oh, thank God for that!’ said Alison, and a hot shower of joyful tears relieved her; and now she started up at every sound, and inquired again and again the exact distance between the Beguinage and the Marché aux Souliers.

‘Ma sœur Alison, you must not speak so much and be so impatient,’ said the Beguine, holding up a finger.

‘What—you know my name?’

‘Yes, it is mine also.’

‘But how?’

Then the Beguine told her how she had become aware of it; and that she too was an Alison, Lison or Lisette—it was all one—and as she spoke her hearer’s memory went back to that day with the buckhounds on which our story opens, when Bevil Goring expressed some surprise at her name, and she had explained that it was an old Scoto-French one, and common to the Cheynes of Essilmont; and as she thought of him she pressed his ring to her lips, as if it had been some sacred relique.

‘How well you speak English,’ said Alison.

‘Because I was educated in the English convent at Bruges,’ replied the sister; ‘but hark, there is a voiture at the gate—mon-sieur has come!’

‘Papa,’ murmured Alison, in a choking voice, as she felt herself become a very child again, and another minute saw his

arms around her, and her face upon his breast, while she indulged in a passionate fit of weeping, and he with difficulty restrained his tears.

Alison then, after a little time, looked earnestly in his face, and was shocked to see how wan, and thin, and pinched it had become ; for indeed, during the mystery that enveloped her disappearance, he had undergone terrible mental agony and much bodily fatigue, for with all his selfishness he loved Alison as the only link that bound him to earth.

Her narrative of how she missed Lord Cadbury in that crowded place, the Théâtre des Variétés, to which she should never have gone, tallied completely with that of the former ; but it was not until next day that she detailed fully the manner in which she had been lured by ‘Captain Smith’ to the Café au Progrès, and the terror with which she had fled from that place into the snowy street.

‘Captain Smith!’ exclaimed Sir Ranald through his set teeth, while his eyes sparkled with rage. ‘Could I but meet that person, old as I am, I would give him cause long to remember the weight of my cane, the scoundrel. I must write to Cadbury on the subject and inquire.’

‘Write!—is Lord Cadbury gone?’ asked Alison, timidly and hopefully.

‘Yes, back to London; he was telegraphed for.’

Alison gave a sigh of relief.

‘Shall we go home now, papa—I mean when I am well enough to be about?’

Sir Ranald paused before replying. Had she relented towards Cadbury with a desire to see him, or was it a longing to be near ‘that fellow Goring’ which prompted the question? One fact seemed pretty evident, that she and the latter knew nothing of each other’s movements, and that she was utterly oblivious of his being or having been in Antwerp.

‘Home—to where?’ he asked.

‘Chilcote, papa.’

Her reply was perfectly straightforward, though it again suggested ideas of Bevil Goring, but Sir Ranald deemed that he must have ‘effectually crushed that fellow’s presumption by the rough tenor of their last meeting.’

‘Chilcote it shall be then, perhaps,’ said he.

‘Oh, yes, papa; it is so quiet there, even amid our little troubles,’ said she, as he left her, when the Beguinage gates were closed for the evening; ‘and all I want is peace and rest—peace and rest.’

‘Shall you ever get them in this world?’ asked Sister Lisette.

Alison regarded her wistfully, and said,

‘Why not? Can you have led a stormy life?’

‘Far from it. My life in the world was a happy one till one dire calamity fell upon me, and drove me to find peace for ever here; but how true it is “that it is vain to

try to knit up the present with the past; each part of our lives has its own pleasures and hopes." But now my pleasure is to do good—my only hope to die soon and well.'

'And the calamity to which you refer?' asked Alison, softly, while greatly interested by the singularly sweet and subdued manner of the young Beguine.

'Was the death of my dear, dear husband,' replied the sister; and so, while she sat stitching away at the shining garment, resplendent with gold—a priest's vestment—for old Père Leopold of the Church of St. André, she told Alison some of her experiences in life, and amid them, curious to relate, there occurred repeatedly a name with which the reader is already familiar.

Alison had a sweetly sympathetic way with her, and her namesake was seized by one of the unaccountable fits of confidence that come to most of us at times to speak about herself, and tell the story of her own sorrows.

CHAPTER IV.

A YEAR OF JOY.

A VERY simple circumstance—an occasion of every-day life—a railway journey, brought about the awful tragedy in her life, by which she was left a widow at twenty, after being wedded a year—which she called a year of joy, left without a near relation in the world but her brother, Victor Gabion, a captain of Artillery, who, strange to say, was the source of all her sorrow.

‘After leaving the English convent at Bruges, I returned to the house of my guardian, M. Hoboken, a merchant in the Avenue du Commerce here. My parents were dead ; I had but one brother, Victor

Gabion, to whose brother officer Lucien I had been betrothed by them, and whom I had known from his early boyhood, when we had been playmates together, and before we came to those restrictions in intercourse peculiar to French and Belgian society in later years.

‘We had learned to love each other very much, Lucien and I, though now we could only see each other at given times, and always in presence of a third party; and each time I seemed to discover some fresh trait in his disposition which rendered him more worthy of love and more worthy of the tenderest affection.

‘He was so handsome, my Lucien, so kind, so tender; and so good, so religious and true! He had that dark southern beauty which makes a man so attractive to a fair woman, and, moreover, he possessed that charm which is more attractive and dangerous still—he was interesting.’

Alison thought of her own *fiancée*, Bevil

Goring, and believed she could understand all this to the fullest extent.

‘His means were ample and his position good, for, apart from his rank in the artillery, he was the representative of the Volcarts, one of the seven *Familles Patriciennes d’Anvers*, whose seven coats-of-arms, all bearing a *fesse checky* you may see at this hour carved in the ancient Steyne of Antwerp. But why think of or boast of such things, when life, we are told, is but a dream, and often a very painful and feverish one !

‘I have told you that I was educated in the convent at Bruges with English girls and English ladies. Hence I picked up among them some of that genuine and honest freedom of action which they understood and enjoyed ; so when my betrothal to Lucien was fully known, and even the time of our marriage stated, we contrived to have more than one pleasant meeting unknown to my grim guardian, M. Hoboken,

whose absorption in business, and often long absence at the Bassin du Kattendyk, and even at Flushing, afforded us facilities we could not otherwise have had.

‘ But in all this there was a dire fatality, and I shall never forget the day that brought it about.

‘ M. Hoboken was to be absent at Flushing for two days, and madame was an invalid—unable to go abroad. I met Lucien by appointment in one of the solitary walks, in the quiet park near the Avenue du Commerce, with a gift I had procured for him, when within a week of our marriage.

“ Look what I have brought for you !” said I, as I opened a morocco case containing an armlet of silver, like an Indian bangle—you know what I mean—flat and broad, and closed by a spring lock. In raised letters on the outside was my name, Alison, with the date of our coming marriage.

“ You are my prisoner already,” said I, laughingly, as I fitted the band round his

wrist, and the spring closed with a snap, thus it could neither fall off nor pass over his hand.

““My dear love!” he exclaimed, and pressed me passionately to his breast.

““Now, you are most completely mine,” I whispered; “fettered for life—as without my aid you can never get it off.”

““Why?”

““Because I shall keep the key,” said I, and coquettishly dropped it into my bosom.

““Even as you have the key to my heart,” he added,

‘After a pause he said,

““M. Hoboken is still at Flushing?”

““Yes—and does not return till to-morrow.”

““Très bien!” said Lucien, “by what hour, at the utmost, may Madame Hoboken miss you—or require you?”

““By seven certainly, and she supposes me to be at the Beguinage—and so will ask no questions, to put me in a false position.”

“Seven—it wants eight hours of that time. See, Lisette, how lovely the day is—how bright the sun, and how beautiful the white and pink hawthorn that load the air with fragrance.”

“Well, what of that?”

“Does not such a day make you long to leave dusty Antwerp behind you, and to roam in the country?”

“It does indeed; but I dare not think of such a thing—till—till next week,” I replied, coyly.

“Lisette,” said he, “were you ever at the village of Elewyt, where the old château of Rubens stands, between Malines and Vilvorde? It is a lovely place, and wild as lovely; not a soul would see us there. Come with me, darling, and let us spend one happy day together.”

“I dare not—I dare not,” as a vision of Madame Hoboken, grim, prim, and full of proprieties, oppressed me, though I was secretly overwhelmed with delight at the

suggestion of this stolen and, to me, new kind of pleasure—a whole beautiful summer afternoon to be spent hand in hand with Lucien—hand in hand, as we were wont to be when children in the Place Verte or on the Boulevards.

“Come with me, sweet one,” he whispered, “it will never—can never be known. It is less than an hour by railway, and, amid the bosky thickets and gardens of the old château we shall seem to leave the world behind us.”

‘So strong was the temptation to spend an untrammelled afternoon with my betrothed—he who within a week was to be my husband—that I yielded. I knew that I ran a dreadful risk in being seen alone with him, for Antwerp is one of the most scandalous and gossiping towns in Belgium. In this country the rules are very strict as regards the daily intercourse of ladies and gentlemen, in the mere matters of meeting or conversing, as compared with you in

England, where the perfect freedom of the innocent is so great; and hence, I doubt not, your happier marriages; for in Belgium, as in France, we are forced to espouse those to whose inner lives we are strangers, and to whose hearts, before marriage, we can have no key, if it is ever found at all.

‘A voiture took us to the train, and we took seats in separate carriages. Already the simple, child-like expedition had an air of guilt, and a tremulous fear possessed me as the train glided out of the station, through a cutting in the fortifications at the Rue du Rempart—the wet fosse was left behind, and we sped through the open country.

‘Glorious was the summer day; exhaled by heat, the silvery mist was curling up from the rich pastures, amid which the drowsy cattle stood knee-deep, and from the fertile arable lands, over which the giant sails of the windmills cast their shadows; but my heart—now that I was

alone, though separated from Lucien by only a carriage or two—sank lower and lower with vague apprehension, and I restrained my tears with difficulty. I was full of terrors, scruples, and fears an English girl, circumstanced as I was, would fail to comprehend, and after traversing miles of dairy farms, where the summer breeze played so sweetly on the long ripples of verdant grass, we reached the little roadside station, where a path diverged to Elewyt. I gathered courage when Lucien Volcarts joined me, and we found ourselves indeed alone, for we were the only persons who quitted the train, which steamed slowly—as all Belgian trains do—on its way to Vilvorde, and our short but delicious day of rambling and planning, scheming and dreaming out our future, hand clasped in hand, began.

‘We saw the old *château* of Rubens, now falling fast to decay, amid its trees, on the land of which he was seigneur, but we did

not go near it, and contented ourselves with wandering amid the sylvan scenery, all of which had the charm of extreme novelty to me. The birds that flew overhead or sung in the hedgerows; the thickets of beech and oak, casting shadows over pools where the trout rose to catch the floating fly; the white, waxen-like lilies floating also on their surface; a little stream pouring slowly between gravel banks and sandstone rocks; deep water-cuts in which the Cuyp-like cattle stood midleg for coolness; the quaint cottages, few and far apart; the carillons playing in a distant spire, were all sources of delight to me—delight all the more, that I could turn from them ever and anon to look into the tender and loving eyes of Lucien.

‘At one of the cottages, which quite approached the dignity of a small farm, we got some refreshment—bread, milk, and cheese—just as we had been wont to do when children in charge of the same *bonne*,

and the recollection of that made us laugh and all the more enjoy such simple fare; and truth to tell, though so near our marriage day, in the freedom of the hour we felt very much as if we were happy children again; and long we lingered in one spot, I remember, on a grassy bank under a bower of hawthorn, where the flies buzzed and the bees hummed, and the village bells rang softly out, but now it was their evening chime.

‘Evening—that suggested thoughts of home and the necessity for returning, and we had some miles to walk to the railway-station at Elewyt.

“It is only five, dearest Lisette,” urged Lucien, looking at his watch; “and the train, which deposits us at Antwerp, is not due for an hour yet. In a little time we shall go, *petite*.”

‘The die was cast, for a day of pleasure but marred by secret fears. I was content to remain a little longer, and then we set

out for the station. More than once did my apprehensive heart, full of undefined forebodings, suggest the sound of a coming train upon the air, and once, perhaps, it was real, for, on reaching the hamlet of Elewyt, we found the station-gate shut and the platform untenanted.

‘Lucien looked at his watch and grew pale. The hands still stood at five o’clock—it was now past seven, the hour at which I should have been at Madame Hoboken’s, and the *last* train had gone some minutes before.

“Gone!” replied Lucien, in a bewildered tone, to his informant; “and the next?”

“Not till seven to-morrow morning—from Brussels *viâ* Vilvorde.”

‘Both of us were filled with dire dismay as we heard this. Could a voiture, a vehicle of any kind, be procured? Alas! there was not such a thing at Elewyt.

‘We turned away with sickening hearts,

and I must own that mine died within me. How was I ever to face grim and grave Madame Hoboken? I felt as if I had committed a terrible crime; I shed the bitterest tears, and I cannot tell you, here at least, how sweetly Lucien strove to console and soothe me.

“I must find you shelter for the night at yonder cottage, where we got the milk, till train time to-morrow,” said Lucien; “for myself, I must find it where I may. Come, *petite*, take courage; a little time, and we shall be blessedly independent of everyone.”

“On seeing Lucien’s well-filled purse, the woman at the cottage was willing enough to accommodate us, especially on learning that we had lost the train; but she filled me with fresh dismay on informing me, with a cunning and penetrating glance there was no mistaking, that she had “but one *chambre à coucher*, which she sometimes let to passing English people and others who wished

to avoid strangers; and you, monsieur——”

““Oh! I will sleep in the stable, or anywhere, madame, provided you can accommodate *mademoiselle ma sœur*,” interrupted Lucien, colouring at the necessary falsehood which he told for the first time in all his blameless life, but it was one to protect me.

‘Whether the landlady believed him or not I cannot say; but there was a strange and saucy twinkle in her eyes, and while in attendance upon us she provoked me by an air of discretion she adopted; from past experience apparently she was far too discreet to make sudden irruptions on our *tête-à-tête* evening, however innocent it was, in outward seeming as she no doubt thought, and Lucien twisted his dark moustache angrily, as he muttered,

““*Sapristi!* this hag does not live midway between Brussels and Antwerp for nothing.”

““Darkness must be closing over Antwerp now, and all the lamps in the Avenue

du Commerce will be lighted throughout its spacious length and breadth," was then my thought; "what would Madame Hoboken be thinking and saying of my non-appearance? Had Monsieur Hoboken returned by train from Flushing? Doubtless he had. Where would they be anxiously and angrily suspecting I was?" If they supposed me to be remaining—as I had more than once done if a night proved wet—when visiting here at the Beguinage all would be well; but the morning might ere long produce untoward revelations, and I wept as if my heart would break when once again I was left alone, as my poor Lucien betook him to sleep in a loft above the stables, deploring the *malheur* in which he had involved us both; but he had no one to scold him save his colonel if he missed a parade, while my life and whole future might be made a burden to me.

‘Anyway, I was, from a Belgian point of view especially, in a dreadfully false position.’

‘There could have been no mistake as to the hour of the fatal train, though all public clocks in Belgium strike the hour half an hour beforehand, thus at half-past eleven the clock announced twelve; and luckily for me Lucien was in plain clothes, not *en grande tenue* as he usually was, with sword and epaulettes on; consequently he would be less remarked, and fortunately the rain fell heavily that night, which might account for my remaining for shelter at the Beguinage.

‘When morning came my spirits rose a little, and I was up betimes to meet the early train. How lovely looked the opening summer day. The grass in the fields, the herbs and flowers in the gardens all glittered in the rays of the sun, as if the dew that moistened them had been diamonds, and the tops of the firs seemed edged with silver. A golden and purple glow filled all the eastern sky, and between it and earth the vapours of night were float-

ing. The birds were awake, and the bees hummed and the butterflies flitted about.

‘To me the country seemed new and charming, and its continuity of horizontal lines, each rising beyond the other to the level horizon, where in the distance rose the spires of Antwerp, gave a sense of vastness and novelty.

‘In different carriages Lucien and I returned to the city. We parted with but a glance at the station, and with a palpitating heart I sought my temporary home in the Avenue du Commerce—my mind a prey to dire misgivings, full of the stolen summer day at Elewytt, the lost train, the cottage amid the pastures, and Madame Hoboken to be confronted!

‘My innocent secret made a very coward of me. Never had I told a falsehood, and I felt as if I would rather die than tell one now. I had done nothing to be ashamed of, and yet the inferences were terrible, especially in society constituted as it is in Belgium.

“You were, of course, at the Beguinage?” said madame, interrogatively, as she came in from early mass.

“Yes; I went there in the forenoon,” I replied, with a sinking heart, though such was precisely the case.

“And doubtless the rain detained you all night?”

“The rain,” said I, assentingly.

“Yet it did not begin to fall till after you should have been at home.”

‘I hurried to my own room to avoid further questioning, happy in the conviction that in six days now I should be the wife of Lucien, and a free woman.

‘Let me hasten over all that followed.

‘How my brother Victor—cold, proud, and stern—discovered our escapade I never exactly knew, nor ever shall know probably till that day when all things shall be revealed, but he became, fatally for us, aware of it all.

“You were *not* at the Beguinage on the

night you said you were?" said he, in a low concentrated voice, two days after, while grasping my wrist like a vice, and eyeing me with eyes that sparkled with fury.

"How do you dare to say so?" I exclaimed, but in a low and agitated voice.

"Sapristi!" said he. "You shall learn in time."

'My heart died within me, for there was the blackness of a thundercloud in Victor's face as he flung me from him, and matters progressed quickly after that. I was confined to my own room, but Madame Hoboken informed me that several officers came to and fro after Lucien—that there were long and grave conferences—that Lucien seemed terribly disturbed, and she feared there was to be a duel on the subject, and a duel there was, but not with swords or pistols. Oh, mon Dieu! In the agony of my heart I am anticipating.

'I grew nearly mad with terror till my marriage morning came, and I found that no

catastrophe had taken place, for Victor came to conduct me to church, and I wept tears of thankfulness, joy, and gratitude, as one who had escaped the shipwreck of a whole life (through no fault of my own), when I was united by Père Leopold to Lucien in the Church of St. André—the church in which we had both been baptised, where we had made our first communion together—that church with its wonderfully carved pulpit, representing Andrew and Peter called from their nets and boats by the Saviour, all as large as life ; and the altar of St Anthony, with his little pig ; and the black devil, with a long, red tongue, that used to frighten me in childhood.

‘The moment the ceremony was over Victor quitted the church without a word, and I never saw him again. He never visited or came near us, but remained sullenly aloof, as the months of the first, and alas, last, year of our married life—my year of joy—rolled swiftly on. His mood would

change, I hoped, in time. Meanwhile, Lucien, my husband, was all the world to me ; and how proud and pleased I used to be to see our names united, Volcarts-Gabion, as is the custom in Antwerp.

‘Looking back to that time I fear that, in our excessive love for each other, Lucien and I were a little selfish. We seemed to have so much to do in our new home—a pleasant house in the Avenue Van Dyck, overlooking the wooded mounds and beautiful lakes of the park—we had ever so much to say to each other, that we seemed to have no leisure for making friends, or even acquaintances, and we forgot to return, or did so grudgingly, the visits of our hospitable neighbours.

‘If I am to speak from personal experience no woman was ever more superlatively happy than I, or more blessed in her husband, and every hour that Lucien could spare from his military duties at the Caserne de Predicateurs was devoted me ; and so my

year of joy stole swiftly away, and the first anniversary of our marriage drew near.

‘At last I became painfully conscious of a new and unusual gloom, restlessness, and depression of manner in Lucien, even when he was caressing me, which he began to do more tenderly and frequently than ever. There was something unfathomable in the expression of his eyes, and unaccountable in the sadness of his voice, and in vain I pressed him to tell me what grieved him.

“Every human heart has some secret which it longs to keep hidden from all,” said he one day at last.

“But you, dearest Lucien, should have none from me,” I urged, with my face on his breast, which was heaving painfully under my cheek.

“That to which I refer you will learn in time—most terribly—my darling Lisette,” said he.

“Oh, why not now?” I urged; “how cruel this is of you, Lucien!”

“In old tales,” said he, kissing away my tears, “you have read of persons who sold themselves to the devil?”

“Yes,” said I, breathless with wonder and apprehension at his manner.

“And whose time on earth was hence allotted?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think that after such a bond was signed—perhaps in blood—life would be pleasant?”

“No, Lucien; but what *do* you mean?”

“That I seem to have so sold myself,” he replied, wildly, with his eyes closed.

“Oh, explain—what do you—what *can* you mean?” I asked him, imploringly, as a dreadful fear came over me that his brain was affected.

“I have sold myself to an evil spirit, and now come remorse and misery—remorse for what you will suffer, misery for my own future.”

“Oh, Lucien—my husband!” I exclaim-

ed, folding him in my arms, "what do these dreadful words mean?"

"I have so sold myself in a manner, Lisette," said he, passionately, "and I shall have to pay the bitter, bitter penalty in losing you and life, and even more, perhaps, and all for what is called honour."

"What awful riddle is this?" I moaned.

His words seemed to me like some dead language, the import of which I failed to understand.

"Do not, oh, Lisette, when the fatal time comes, deem me a madman," said he, covering my face with kisses—yea, and tears too.

"What end—oh, what can all this mean?" I cried, repressing with difficulty a desire to shriek aloud, while holding him in my embrace, for he seemed almost to faint; his lips were a violet tint, and his face was deathly pale.

"I cannot tell you all that is before me, or what I have to do and to suffer, beyond

even what I suffer now, lest you should loathe me, scorn me ; but oh, pity me, Lisette, pity me when all is over."

" "Oh, God, he is mad !" I whispered in my heart.

" "I dare not tell you," he resumed ; " I have an enemy who is merciless, and I have blighted your life and my own by an act of folly, almost baseness, over which I had no control."

" Unutterable, indescribable was my longing, my anxious and affectionate curiosity to know what this secret was, but next day—on the anniversary of our marriage—I knew all.

" By an arrangement of which all the officers of their corps were cognizant, Lucien and my brother, Victor Gabion, who had challenged him, fought what was called an American duel two days before our marriage. Two little balls, a black and a white one, had been placed in a hat, and each of the two principals drew out one, with the understanding "that he who drew the black

one must be numbered with the dead within twelve months."

'The year—my year of joy—had expired, and in the evening Lucien shot himself! Two days before, he had written a touching letter to Victor, praying him for my sake to release him from the penalty he had incurred, but the letter miscarried, it was never delivered, and no answer came.

'Lucien had died on the instant, and he was found with my bracelet clasped upon his arm. It is buried with him, and my heart is buried too,' added the Beguine, sweetly and simply.

Hence it was, doubtless, that Captain Victor Gabion had such a horror of duels, as he told Bevil Goring, and that the memory of one haunted him; and hence it was also that Sister Lisette, after being a Red Cross nurse in the war, finally entered the Beguinage, that she might the better dedicate herself to the service of God and to prayer for the dead.

Alison Cheyne had endured many bitter-
nesses, humiliations, and mortifications dur-
ing her short experience of life ; but, save
the loss of her mother and brothers, no such
keen and unmerited misery as her poor
Belgian namesake, whose strange story
gave her some food for reflection, when the
world of waters rolled between them.

The sojourn of Alison in the Beguinage
of the Rue Rouge was an epoch in the
history of that ancient institution, an era
in the peacefully monotonous and unevent-
ful lives of the Sisterhood.

Before this sudden illness fell upon her,
Alison's health had been at a very low ebb,
'down many pegs too low,' as her father
had said. She had lived in a series of ex-
citements, joys, and sorrows of a feverish
nature, the joy of meetings with Bevil,
the sorrows of their separation ; fears for
her father's health, his debts and duns ; she
had to exert herself all day, yet lay all
night awake ; then came the rough voyage

and the catastrophe which formed a part of it. Her delicate frame was being worn out, without the necessary supports of proper rest or proper food, and yet latterly she had been an inmate of one of the largest and most magnificent hotels in Antwerp.

But she had great vitality about her, and now recovered fast.

‘We must meet again—we shall meet again!’ exclaimed Alison, as she kissed her namesake many times while bidding her adieu.

‘How are we ever to meet,’ said the Sister, smiling, ‘unless you come to the Beguinage, as I never leave it?’

‘Time will show,’ said Alison.

‘Yes,’ replied the other, ‘time and God will show.’

Alison remembered these apparently prophetic words after she was at home, and Antwerp was far away, and her visit there seemed but as a dream ; for three days after

saw her and Sir Ranald in England. 'Ours is a nation of travellers,' says a writer, 'and no wonder, when the elements, air, water, fire, attend our bidding to transport us from shore to shore; when the ship rushes into the deep, her track the foam as of some mighty torrent, and in three hours or less we stand gazing or gazed at among a foreign people. None want an excuse. If rich they go to enjoy; if poor to retrench; if sick to recover; if studious to learn; if learned to relax from their studies.'

None of these objects had brought Alison—the creature of circumstances, and of the plans formed by others—to Antwerp, and now that she was home again—or once again on British soil—the reader may imagine how anxiously she longed for some tidings of Bevil Goring (all unwitting that he had been so long near her, in the land of the stranger), whether he had gone to face the perils of war on the Gold Coast, or been detached at home; and the only

one who could have speedily enlightened her thereon was the person to whom she dared not utter his name—Sir Ranald.

So poor Alison could but sigh and think with L. E. L. that

‘ Earth were too like Heaven
If length of life to love were given.’

CHAPTER V.

IN HAMPSHIRE AGAIN.

‘**I** WISH Jerry were here to help me,’ sighed Lady Julia, as she lounged in a luxurious fauteuil in the beautiful drawing-room of Wilmothurst, with ‘Cousin’ Emily, on a dull afternoon of February, when the trees in the stately chase were dripping with moisture, and the reedy fens and lonesome marshes, where the bittern boomed and the heron waded, looked dreary, and the edges of the water-flags were stiff and white with frost. ‘I would Jerry were here to help me with his advice. Not that his advice would help us much perhaps, Emily,’ she added, querulously.

‘Advice, Aunt Julia? When poor dear

Jerry was here, he did nothing,' replied that young lady.

'And that was all he ever cared to do, Emily; but I have seen so little of Jerry since he joined the Rifles that I seem to be quite alone in the world.'

And she sighed a little conventional sigh, while spreading her feather fan, though a large crystal screen was placed between her and the brilliant fire that burned in a grate of steel polished like silver.

'But matters have come to a crisis with us; through me, I fear,' she added.

'Through you, aunt?'

'Yes, unfortunately.'

'How—in what way?'

'Did you not see how I turned my back upon that minx, Miss Chevenix, at the Charity Bazaar last week; cut her dead indeed, and this is the result!' exclaimed Lady Julia, tossing from her contemptuously a letter she had recently received.

'What result?' asked Emily Wilmot, too

languid to open the missive in question.

‘Her father will wait for the interest on the mortgages no longer, and we are ruined! Even this house of Wilmothurst may have to pass to him, and we shall have to go—to go—’

‘Where, aunt?’ asked Emily, becoming roused now, her light blue eyes dilated with wonder, and her nose seeming more *retroussé* than ever.

‘God alone knows where; to some obscure watering-place probably. If this insolent fellow, who certainly has not been paid for some years, would only wait till Jerry returns from the Gold Coast, and some arrangements could be made,’ continued Lady Julia, in her plaintive and bleating kind of voice. ‘House, lands, and all will go to Chevenix, and only a few acres will be left us. We are beggars,’ she continued, with angry querulousness, but without altering a line of her smooth, handsome, and passionless face. ‘We have nothing of our own—all will become his.’

‘But surely, aunt, you have friends. There is Lord Twiseldown—there is Sir Jasper Dehorsey.’

‘I cannot stoop to ask, and who would lend me thousands—not even money-lenders now, for there is nothing left in the shape of land to borrow on. Wilmothurst will become the property of this upstart farmer’s son out and out. Jerry will have to give up everything but his commission, and go to India no doubt. Fortunately he has that resource left him ; but I—I shall no longer be able to maintain even you, Emily.’

Lady Wilmot’s emotions of annoyance and anger at Mr. Chevenix and the whole situation took the form of making her niece smart, while in reality she had no very genuine fear of such an awful crisis coming about, thinking that heaven or fate, or something or other, would never permit a person of her position to be so heavily visited.

‘And *what* shall I do, auntie?’ asked the young lady, plaintively, but with surprise.

‘You may have to go out into the world as a governess or companion.’

‘Governess or companion! while Bella Chevenix——’

‘Will reign here as heiress of Wilmot-hurst,’ said Lady Julia, with the first approach to expression on her lineless face—a bitter and scornful smile.

‘Oh, it is hard—very hard!’

‘Very hard for *me*,’ added Lady Julia, who like most of her class thought chiefly of ‘number one.’

‘She will make some good marriage,’ said Emily, after a pause.

‘She is decidedly very handsome, and has, my maid Florine tells me, magnificent hair.’

‘Handsome,’ queried the fair Emily; ‘yes, but aunt, this is an age of belladonna, pearl powder, rouge, and heaven knows what more.’

‘I hope the Gold Coast will have cured Jerry of his foolish fancy for that artful girl.’

‘Her tastes are decidedly rural. I have been told that she often assists the vicar in visiting the poor, and actually teaches in his school at times.’

‘Well, she is more in her place there, and acting the village Samaritan, than riding with the buckhounds, dancing at county and garrison balls, and giving herself the airs of the *habituée du monde*.’

Lady Julia had in her arms a Maltese spaniel, a wheezy, fat, and petted cur that often reposed in a mother-of-pearl basket lined with blue satin, and she was fondling it as she had never fondled Jerry when an infant—a cur that snapped viciously at every one who approached within ten yards of it or her, but which she always apostrophised and talked to as if it had been a human being; and, sooth to say, it was about as human in feeling as this earl’s daughter, so far as tenderness and a capacity for loving went—loving any one at least but herself.

‘Come, my sweet one, Floss,’ she now exclaimed, oblivious suddenly of her approaching woes, and while it was leaping and yapping on her knee she kissed it repeatedly, and said, in a cooing voice, ‘Did it want to go for a drive on this cold cold February afternoon? Then its mamma will order the carriage and take it for one.’

If Jerry had never in his tender boyhood been fondled in this manner, how often had he felt in after-life that much of the attention his mother *did* at any time bestow upon him was due less to any maternal instinct or love than to his position and means as Squire of Wilmothurst and to family pride and vanity.

‘A letter, my lady,’ said a tall footman, presenting one on a salver, and withdrawing noiselessly.

‘Another from this man Chevenix already. Again! really, really, what can this person want now!’

She tore it impatiently open, the diamonds on her white fingers sparkling as she did so, and her delicately pencilled eyebrows were elevated as she read with aristocratic surprise and impatience :—

“ “With reference to my letter of this morning about the mortgages, dear Lady Julia, take all the delay you may wish. They shall not be foreclosed till time has soothed the awful blow that has fallen upon you.” ’

‘ Blow!’ exclaimed Lady Julia. ‘ What blow?—what can the man mean?’

‘ Read on, auntie—there is something more.’

“ “The fall of your son so gallantly in Western Africa is a circumstance to be deplored indeed by all—but more than all by those who knew him.”

‘ Good heavens—good heavens—good heavens!’ said Lady Julia thrice, in a low yet fretful voice, as if she scarcely understood the situation; ‘ it is all some dreadful

mistake ; Jerry—Jerry—a mistake, Emily. I saw nothing of it in the *Post* or *Times* this morning.'

She was trembling excessively now, and Emily's eyes were full of hot welling tears. Neither of the ladies had seen the fatal intelligence from the seat of war, for, as they all read only the fashionable intelligence, they had heeded transactions on the Gold Coast as much they did those that may be occurring in the mountains of the moon.

However, to do them justice, both were thunderstruck—impressed as much as it was in their frozen nature to be—when Emily, after rushing for the morning paper, found the brief telegram or paragraph to which, no doubt, Mr. Chevenix referred :

'Coomassie in flames. Army falling back on the Gold Coast ; but the rivers rising fast. Chief casualties—Captain Dalton, Rifles, severely wounded ; Captain J. Wilmot, do., killed and carried off by the enemy.'

The fashionable aunt and niece, at whose

pleasant doors grief and sorrow seldom or never came, sat for a time as if stunned. Chevenix and his mortgages were alike forgotten ; they could but think of Jerry and strive to realize the—to them—almost impossible situation, while the dull and depressing afternoon stole on.

How could it be, or why was it, that Jerry, so jolly and manly—the son of such a cold and feeble-minded woman of rank and fashion, who had done her best, but failed, to spoil or pamper him—was reserved for such a fate as this !

He had escaped the battle of Amoaful, the passage of the Prah, the fighting prior to the capture of Coomassie, and all the perils of death by fever and toil to perish thus, when the wretched end had been achieved and the troops must have been on their homeward way.

Poor Jerry ! The life of the mess and the life of Wilmothurst when at home, where, in consideration of his five feet ten inches and

irreproachable moustache, he had been latterly permitted to be termed a 'son,' and not, as his mother would have wished, a 'boy.'

Lady Julia Wilmot had never posed in society save as a beauty, and the great consideration that was ever shown her was due to that beauty and her birth and position as an earl's daughter; but not to any brilliant qualities of head—still less of amiability of heart. Thus in many ways she was a fair average example of 'the upper ten.'

So now it may be said of her and Cousin Emily on this disastrous occasion,

'Some natural tears they shed, but wip'd them soon.'

And their first thoughts were of a suitable and handsome tablet to Jerry's memory in the Vicarage Church, and of fashionable mourning for themselves and the household. It would all cast a gloom over their return to town after Easter in March, when a 'brief season' would commence—if they

went to town at all, for 'thank Heaven,' added Lady Julia, 'no one shall accuse me of not doing my duty to my son. I shall order my mourning at Jay's, and certainly will not wear one of those frightful bonnets with long—what is it now, John?'

A tall footman, with a face of woe made up for the occasion, and a manner adapted to it—for the news had spread like wildfire over all the house and vicinity, and when many genuine tears were shed in the servants' hall, where Jerry was a prime favourite with the women folks—brought in a card, announcing

'Miss Chevenix.'

'Chevenix again—this is intolerable! Did you say not at home?'

'I said you were engaged—severially indisposed, my lady,' he replied, shaking his cauliflower-looking head solemnly.

'Yet—she would come in.'

'Yes, my lady.'

'And at a time like this—when we are

plunged in unutterable woe! Such confident assurance !'

The door was thrown open, and Bella Chevenix came swiftly forward as the servant withdrew.

But in this we are anticipating a little.

CHAPTER VI.

‘THOUGHTS THAT OFTEN LIE TOO DEEP FOR
TEARS.’

LIKE the again partially widowed Laura, Bella Chevenix had watched with an aching heart the progressive news of the war among barbarians on the burning Gold Coast, from the landing on New Year's Day to the battle of Amoaful, the passage of the Prah, and the victorious advance on Coomassie; and now came the sudden shock and horror by a tantalisingly brief telegram, in the upper corner of a newspaper, headed by a sensational title in large type, but three lines, announcing that the two officers had fallen—Dalton severely wounded, and Wilmot killed and carried off by the enemy!

Bella sat for a time as one turned to stone, incapable even of tears—oppressed and crushed down by the one appalling and apparently unrealisable thought.

‘Jerry dead—Jerry dead—and I shall never see him more!’

Jerry, so full of life and fun and jollity! It seemed incredible. And yet, why so? He only ran the risks that many others were running. But the mind of Bella went painfully back to their parting, when mutual doubts of the purity and honesty of each other’s intentions—doubts born of the existence of those horrible mortgages—had mutually fettered their tongues, especially so far as *she* was concerned, and, when they separated, little dreaming that it was for ever—separated with a simply repeated ‘good-bye’ and a lingering pressure of the hand, while no kiss, no embrace, no promise were exchanged, and he was going away to be done to death in that savage land; and she remembered how she wept floods of un-

availing tears as the last sound of his footsteps died away. Poor fellow! And now she should see him no more—never again!

To Bella Chevenix sorrow, repentance, and love were alike useless, so far as Jerry Wilmot was concerned. To the girl, just then, it seemed as if the dream of her life was over and done; in it no other could replace Jerry; the light had gone for ever out of her world now. She threw herself upon her knees, in the solitude of her chamber, in a passionate burst of grief—the brilliant, beautiful, and once happy Bella—and strove to say, ‘Thy will be done,’ but the genuine submission thereto could only come by-and-by.

Under the circumstances of Jerry’s profession and career, some peril, some suffering were not altogether unlooked-for or undreaded; but that he should be killed and carried off by the dreadful Ashantees, of whom she had a very vague yet terrible idea indeed, had been beyond her calcula-

tions—beyond her worst anticipations ! She felt dazed, miserable—intensely, and confused.

‘I am now sure that he loved me well—well and dearly—and how coldly I parted with him ! Oh, Jerry my darling, can it be that I shall never see you again !’ Thus she said to herself over and over in sad reiteration, though no sound but sighs left her lips.

Anon she rose and paced her room, with half uttered exclamations of anguish and sorrow ; and then she would throw herself on her bed, burying her face in her hands, in mute and tearless agony. To think that he was gone—in his grave, if he ever found one—gone without the memory of a kind word from her that would make her future life less bitter.

‘Oh, Jerry—dead—dead !’ she murmured, with ceaseless reiteration.

She had a craving for such sympathy as her father, who was to a great extent ignor-

ant of all that had passed between her and Jerry, could not yield her, and she resolved to visit Laura.

She staggered from the bedside to her toilette-table, and when she looked into the glass she was surprised by the frozen-like despair she saw in her own beautiful face, which was as colourless as Carrara marble now. She bathed her eyes, made a hasty toilette of the most sable things she could select, tied a thick black veil over her face, and, ordering her pony phaeton, set out to visit Laura, to whom the dire tidings had come, of course, betimes, and she too was overwhelmed by affliction that, however, was not without hope.

She was alone now, most terribly alone at Chilcote Grange. Little Netty had been sent to a West End finishing school that she might acquire all sorts of accomplishments and graces with which to delight her father on his return; and now perhaps poor Tony Dalton might die by the banks

of the Prah and never see England again, for the heat of the horrible climate there made all wounds more perilous.

‘Wounded, severely wounded,’ Laura had been repeating to herself: but where wounded, she speculated—how, and with what, and in what part of the poor mortal frame.

The telegram was horribly brief and vague! And now though Laura and Bella Chevenix had few notes to compare, and could say nothing to comfort each other, they gathered some from the communion of tears and thoughts and sorrows.

Laura drew forth—as she had done a score of times before—Dalton’s letters to her from Madeira, the Gold Coast, and sent by more than one homeward-bound ship; and the affection they breathed for her and Netty filled her soul with great gratitude now, *whatever* might happen. She had never received letters from him before—even in their early lover days at St. Leo-

nard's long ago, before their years of separation came: and how strange it was to have received letters from him, conceived in the tenor of these, and signed 'Your affectionate husband, Tony Dalton.'

Now he and Laura were quite old enough to know their own minds, and to deplore the separation a previous less knowledge of each other had brought about between them; neither was likely to make any more false steps, from rashness or impulse, and they had a fair promise of a delicious companionship for the future if they were spared to meet again, and the perils of the Gold Coast ever became a thing of the past, but that fair promise hung by a thread now.

'Had we never met more—met as we did so singularly by the sudden arrival of his regiment in Aldershot,' said Laura, 'and I loved or compelled him, poor darling, to love me again, I might have gone on to the end of my days nursing a sickly sentimental

memory on one hand, with a species of revengeful memory on the other; but, if we never meet more on this side of the grave, I shall—till carried to mine—remember with gratitude that he had learned to love me well, and Netty too, before we lost him for ever.’

All her natural gaiety and much of her *aplomb* had left Laura on the day Dalton sailed from Southampton, and now she was as crushed in spirit as a poor woman well could be. ‘We love because we have loved,’ says a novelist, ‘and it is easier to go on in the old routine, even when all the real life and beauty has died out of it, than to break with the mere *memory* of that time which made our life holy and beautiful to us.’

In the time of this strange enforced separation—in the time of Dalton’s actual desertion of Laura, and when she knew not whether he was dead or living till she met him at Aldershot—this had been something of the sentiment that inspired her; but now

that they had both known and loved each other anew under better auspices, and been so briefly re-united, a contemplation of the catastrophe that might yet happen wrung Laura's heart to the core.

On leaving the latter, Bella, though still a prey to choking grief, in the warm and generous impulse of her nature, conceived the idea of, or thought she might find some comfort in, a visit to Lady Wilmot. She was *his* mother, whose grief at least could not be inferior to her own.

She committed to oblivion all that lady's treatment of herself in the past time, and even but lately at the Charity Bazaar; yet it was not without some misgivings, and even pausing in her progress once or twice, that she turned the heads of her pretty ponies in the direction of Wilmothurst, her tears falling hotly under her thick Shetland veil as she passed down the stately avenue and through the Chase, where every foot of the way suggested some memory of Jerry

and his happy boyhood, when they were playmates till he went to Eton, and Lady Julia—well, never permitted *her* name to be on the ordinary visitors' list. There was a tall elm up which he had clambered, at the risk of his limbs, to get her a magpie's nest; here they had gathered the early primroses in April, and the Lent lilies in May, or hunted for butterflies. How often had they played croquet together on the bowling-green, and rowed dreamily for hours on the tree-shaded river; and at every turn the figure of the boy seemed to come before her, mingled with that of the moustached and handsome young officer to whom she so strangely bade farewell.

Full of these thoughts, Bella would not be repelled by the conventional manner or replies of the footman, and begged so earnestly to see Lady Julia that she was ushered into her presence by the former, as we have described in the last chapter.

Poor Bella had but one thought—Lady

Julia was *his* mother, and gladly in that hour of woe would she have thrown her arms around her and embraced her tenderly; but Lady Julia was cold and calm in aspect and bearing as a Greek marble statue, and received her visitor without rising, and with a brief conventional pressure with one hand while motioning her to be seated with the other.

Whatever hopes Cousin Emily once had of Jerry for a husband—hopes often crushed by his indifference on the subject, and by a knowledge of the necessity that he must marry ‘money’—they were gone now; and, besides, she could receive Bella Chevenix now with more equanimity than hitherto.

But her reception was common-place—chilling also—and poor Bella, feeling herself *de trop*, an utter intruder, felt confusion blend with the grief that oppressed her.

‘After the awful news of this morning, Lady Julia,’ said she, with a great effort, ‘as an old friend of the family, whose an-

cestors have been for years upon the estate, as a neighbour, too, in a lonely part of the county—more than all—all—as—as—I conceived a great craving to see you,’ said the girl, brokenly, in a weak, yet exquisitely sweet voice.

‘Indeed—thanks.’

This was not an encouraging response, nevertheless Bella spoke again.

‘Jerry—Wilmot, I mean—and I were such playmates in our childhood long, long ago, that—that—you know——’

Bella’s voice completely failed her under the cold, inquiring eyes of Lady Julia and Emily Wilmot.

‘Playmates!’ said the former. ‘Yes, your memory does you credit. I thought you must have forgotten all that by this time, as I am sure my poor dear boy did.’

‘Forgotten!’

‘Yes, I think I heard him say something like that to his friend, Captain Goring.’

‘If he spoke of those pleasant times, he

would scarcely have forgotten them,' was the natural response of Bella, to whom Lady Julia, after a languid stare, said,

'Next mail must bring some distinct details of this calamity that has fallen upon me and Miss Wilmot.'

Bella felt that she was excluded from the co-partnery of grief—she who loved the dead as she loved her own soul, and more, and she was almost, in spite of herself, tempted to daringly enter some little protest when Lady Julia spoke again.

'I wish Captain Goring were at home; I should send for him. By the way, does not rumour say he has succeeded to a fortune?'

'To £20,000 a year,' replied Bella, in a low voice.

'Say £10,000—that will be nearer the mark, perhaps £5,000.'

'Why?'

'I believe very little that I see, and always but the half of what I hear,' she replied, fanning herself.

‘How can this woman think of such matters just *now*,’ thought Bella, an emotion of resentful bitterness growing in her heart. ‘Oh, how little did she deserve to have such a son as my darling Jerry!’

The snapping and snarling of Floss, who always resented the advent of visitors, now required all Lady Julia’s kisses and blandishments to soothe him into the recess of his mother-of-pearl basket; and to Bella it seemed monstrous, incredible, her bearing. Only this morning these women heard of the dire calamity, and they were to all appearance as ‘cool as cucumbers’—a little redness they exhibited about the eyes certainly, and a certain subdued manner alone seemed to show that they had in any way laid to heart the death of the poor fellow whose obsequies might have been performed by the birds of the wilderness.

Doubtless Bella failed to understand the highly born and long descended; yet in many a gallant field, against both Scots and

French, long before even the days of the great Civil War, had her ancestors done good and true yeoman service, with bow and bill, for their acres at Langley Park, under the banner of the Wilmots, with its three eagles' heads—*sable* and *argent*.

At last she rose.

‘It is well for you, Lady Julia,’ said she, ‘that you are able to take this awful dispensation of Providence so calmly as you do.’

‘When a thing is inevitable or irreparable, it is best to bow the head and accept it with a good grace,’ replied the bereaved mother, closing her fan, but not rising from the fauteuil on which she was reclining, looking gentle and soft, yet iron-bound and icily conventional.

‘The loss of an only son, and *such* a son?’ exclaimed Bella, indignation mingling with her grief, as she burst into a flood of irrepressible tears, on which Lady Julia gave her a stare of well-bred astonishment, and asked,

‘What do *you* mean, Miss Chevenix, by

this excessive emotion? Have you lost any relation recently that you come almost in black, and with these jet ornaments?’

‘No—but I thought—I thought—’ stammered Bella.

‘You thought—what?’

‘That for poor Jerry——’

‘Do you *mean* Captain Wilmot—my son?’ asked Lady Julia, icily.

‘Yes,’ replied Bella, boldly enough now; ‘we were such old and good friends that I thought—a little change of dress was but becoming reverence to his memory; and I shall make it deeper still.’

‘As you please,’ said Lady Julia, bowing curtly, while Cousin Emily rang the bell, and bowed the visitor out.

The two ladies then stared at each other.

There was a *deduction* to be drawn from honest Bella’s deep, pathetic, and unconcealed interest and grief for the poor dead fellow that proved somewhat offensive to Lady Julia, who, amid her own sorrow—or what

she considered such—had been considering the fashion of her own mourning—of mourning for the entire household—and of a handsomely quartered hatchment to ‘hang upon the outward wall’; thus she was rather astounded and indignant at the rash or adopted bearing in one of Bella’s rank and position; but they savoured, she thought, somewhat of the servants’ hall in demonstrativeness.

She was ashamed as yet to consult her *Dressmakers’ Album*, even with the aid of Emily and Mademoiselle Florine, anent the most becoming fashion of mourning; but tomorrow she would certainly do so.

‘*Assurement, oui!*’ thought Florine.

Anger and no small degree of contempt were in the heart of Bella as she quitted the park gates of Wilmothurst, with a kind of dull and sodden despair mingling therein, as she drove her ponies home in the February twilight to her father’s house that overlooked the village green, and she thought how true were the words of Wordsworth of

‘Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.’

CHAPTER VII.

‘OH, FOR A HORSE WITH WINGS!’

JERRY lay long when we left him last in a state of semi-unconsciousness, thoughts of his past life rather than of his present most perilous and deplorable predicament hovering in his mind. He sometimes imagined himself at the mess, and heard the voices and saw the faces of Goring, Dalton, Frank Fleming, and others; anon he was in the Long Valley at Aldershot skirmishing with his company, or riding a hurdle-race by Twesildown Hill. Then came dreams of the ball at Wilmothurst and of Bella Chevenix in all her beauty, and his cold, pale, passionless mother. Again he was in the playing-fields at Eton—again chosen stroke

of the Oxford boat. All these floated before him with an overwhelming sense of pain in his head, as once again he struggled back to the world and a full sense of the awful horror of his situation came upon him.

Thankful we may be that, as Pope has it,

‘Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescribed, their present state.’

The prospect of Jerry’s future made his heart seem to die within him.

The sun was shining brightly now, and save the loud hum of insect life no sound was in the air or around him. A heavy odour of burnt wood and of moist thatch came upon the passing wind from where the fires of the past night were still smouldering in Coomassie, and once more staggering up Jerry looked around him.

He was alone—left in the bush to perish; and his comrades, where were they?

Miles on the happy homeward march to the coast, with the swollen rivers all unbridged and impassable in their rear!

He saw it all—he felt it all, and knew that he was a lost man. Feeble, defenceless, and single-handed he would fall a victim to the first savage and infuriated Ashantee he met, and his skull would soon be laid as an ornament—a royal trophy—at the foot of the king.

A heavy moan escaped poor Jerry; but the love of life, the instinct of self-preservation is strong in human nature, and his first thought was to endeavour to follow the army.

At a pool he bathed his head and face, washed away the plastered blood that encrusted all the vicinity of the wound on his head, and bound the latter up with his handkerchief. He luckily found his light helmet in the hollow where he had lain unseen by his comrades, and, after giving a glance to the chambers of his loaded revolver, endeavoured to follow as closely as he could the track that led he knew towards the army—the track the latter must have trodden.

But he frequently lost it, vast swamps and sheets of water were formed now where none had been before, and he had to make harassing detours; his powers and his steps were feeble, thus his progress was slow and often doubtful, and ever and anon he had to pause and look around him, fearing that in the dingles of the woody wilderness he might see the dark and agile figure of a hostile savage.

Mid-day came when he was certain that he could have made but a very few miles of progress, and gasping with heat, giddy and weary, he crept under the shadow of a dense leafy bush to rest and conceal himself.

Could he have been certain of the route, he knew that it would have been safer to travel by night, but in the night he must fail to see the traces of it, and now, with weariness and pain, a great horror of the whole situation came upon him, and he could but mutter again and again,

‘Alone—alone in the bush—to die! God help me!’

Poor Jerry was a popular, light-hearted, prosperous, and happy young fellow, whom every one liked and to whom pleasant things happened every day. He was wont to own that he found every one kind and every one nice, and in society, of course, he met many people. Wherever Jerry had gone, at school, at college, or with the Rifles, he converted strangers into acquaintances, and acquaintances soon became his friends. Wherever he went invitations to dinners, balls, drums, lawn-tennis, and other parties flowed upon him, for he was decidedly a popular young fellow, with the girls especially.

All that seemed ended!

To Jerry, accustomed as he had been to the sunny side of life, and to float without a thought upon its rippling and glittering current, there was something worse than death in his present predicament. He could understand being shot in action, and then being buried in a hole or left unburied to

the fowls of the air, but this struggle against destruction—this living death—was utterly beyond all his calculations !

He partook sparingly of the contents of his haversack, reflecting the while on what must inevitably ensue when the last of that support for exhausted nature was expended, for he could not escape a death by starvation even if he escaped death by other means.

Without food, without comrades, without help or means to cross the swollen rivers ! The perspiration burst in beads upon his temples ; his pulsation caused the aching of his contused wound to become agony ; his muscles grew rigid, he set his teeth, and began to surmise how long he would last—how long he could endure all that must be before him now, while muttering again,

‘Alone in the bush to die—God help me !’

He had in his haversack rations for three days ; even if he could make them last for

seven, his resource would end then ; and, even while sheltered by the giant leaves which abounded there, the baleful night dews might induce fever and ague, while the waters that barred his progress were more likely to rise than to fall, as the rainy season, which had made Sir Garnet Wolseley begin his sudden retreat, had now commenced.

Tidings that he had perished would soon be telegraphed to England ; many there, he knew, would regret him ; with something of a bitter smile he remembered the farewell parting with his cold, aristocratic mother, and then the thought of Bella perhaps becoming—for she was known to be rich—the bride of the horsey Lord Twesildown.

The thought of that nerved him to exertion ; the sun was verging westward now, and once more, with feeble steps and slow he took to the track again, half blinded at times by the crimson glare of light that poured between the stems of the trees, for

the track he had to pursue was then straight in the wake of the setting sun.

He could form no idea of the distance he had gone, but the odour of burned wood which reached him from time to time warned him that he was still unpleasantly near Coomassie, and more than once sounds that came upon the wind like a savage shout and the distant beating of a war-drum, made him creep into the jungle for concealment, and thus lose time, when, if he would hope to overtake the army, now many miles on their homeward way, every moment was most precious.

At last, when night, with tropical swift-ness, had descended he found his progress hopelessly barred by that great sheet of water which we have already referred to—a reach of five hundred yards in breadth that rolled now at a place through which in advancing the army had passed dry-shod.

‘Out of the running!’ exclaimed poor Jerry, using his home phraseology; ‘oh,

heavens ! how to bridge this sea that lies between me and the troops ? Oh, for a horse with wings !' he added, unconsciously quoting the exclamation of Cymbeline.

When night fell no resource was left him but to remain there and gaze with haggard eyes and a desponding heart at the cruel sheet of water that lay between him and probable safety.

Brightly, as on the New Year's night that saw the troops landing on that fatal shore, the moon was shining now—brighter even ; never had Jerry seen such brilliancy. In all the vast expanse of the firmament overhead there was not a vestige of cloud. Millions of stars were there, but their splendour was dimmed or obscured by the splendid effulgence of the moon. The vast leaves of plants, whose names were all unknown to the lost Jerry, were shining in dew as if diamonds had rained from heaven ; every giant cotton-tree and palm, every rock and fissure were illuminated, and the birds flew

to and fro as if a new day had dawned, but a day of silver, icy-like splendour, and clear as in a mirror were the shadows of the trees and graceful palms reflected downward in the sheet of water that glittered in the sheen.

But that he was so weary and faint Jerry would have availed himself of this wonderful moonlight and endeavoured to get round the flank of the vast sheet of water that barred his progress, and which reflected the radiance like a mighty sheet of crystal ; but he was compelled to wait till morning, and again sought shelter under some jungly bushes.

Near the place he saw several broken meat tins and empty bottles scattered about, indicating where some of our troops had halted before the final march was made into Coomassie ; and he regarded with interest and anxiety these vestiges which proved that he was in the right track could he but cross the intervening flood.

With his very existence trembling in the balance with fate, what a small matter now seemed the mortgages over Wilmothurst and every consideration save the love of Bella Chevenix ; and while he strove to court sleep—oblivion in that savage wilderness, where no sound met the ear save the plash of falling dew as some overcharged leaf bent downward ; his whole soul was full of her image—the image of her he too probably should never, never see again.

With earliest dawn he was again afoot and seeking to get round the reach of water, but it trended away through hollows far to the north and south, yet with an aching heart he struggled manfully at his task. On every hand towered up to the height of two hundred and fifty feet or more, straight as stone columns, the cotton-trees, like the giants of primeval vegetation, and round their bases flourished the wondrous undergrowth of jungle, under which again grew white lilies, pink flowers, and dog-roses ; amid which

could be heard sharp trumpeting of enormous mosquitoes, with the monotonous too-too of the wild doves, which alone broke the silence of the bush.

‘This silence,’ wrote one who served in the campaign, ‘this apparently never-ending forest, this monotony of rank vegetation, this absence of a breath of wind to rustle a leaf, becomes oppressive, and the feeling is not lessened by the dampness and heaviness of the air, and by the malarious exhalation and odour of decaying vegetation which rise from the swamps.’

The report of a musket at no great distance, followed by the noise made by some wounded animal crashing through the forest, compelled Jerry, with a heart that beat wildly with agitation and alarm, to conceal himself instantly; and he had hardly done so, when four armed Ashantees, with muscular mahogany-coloured forms, gleaming eyes, and shining teeth, passed near him and continued to hover about, as if scouting or in pursuit of game.

This compelled him to lie for hours *en perdu*, and evening began to close again without his having got round the reach of water that lay between him and the way to Prah, and even if he ever did reach the banks of that stream how was he to cross it? for he was not a swimmer.

On this night there was no moon, for the clouds were densely massed in the heavens; the rain fell in torrents, and though sheltered therefrom in the hollow of a rock Jerry listened to the crashing sound of the vast drops falling in a ceaseless shower, with a species of dull despair, for higher than ever would the waters rise now; his food was failing him, and he gave himself up for utterly lost.

With dawn the rain departed, and the sun exhaled a dense steamy mist from the drenched forest; but Jerry dared not leave his lair, for more than once in the distance he heard distinctly cries, strange sounds, and the explosion of firearms, showing

evidently that scouting parties of Ashantees were hovering about, if it were not their whole army following up ours, which must be, he knew, at a vast distance then.

He had now come to his last biscuit, and finding all still when night fell he again addressed himself to the task of attempting to ford the water at a place where it seemed shallow. The sky was again cloudy, veiling most of the stars, and the moon had not yet risen.

At that point the forest was open for a great space, and luxuriant grass and reed-like rushes covered all the soil. Weak and weary, stiff and sore, though he had lurked in concealment all day, he staggered like a drunken man as he approached the water, but ere he could enter it some uncertain sounds made him look behind. He saw the gleam of arms, the flash of steel in the starlight; and then, coming upon him at a rush, apparently were some twenty men, emerging swiftly from the forest he had

left; and though he drew his sword and grasped his revolver, resolved to sell his life bitterly and dearly, so enfeebled was his frame, and so great was the shock—the horror—he experienced at the prospect of the terrible death which so surely awaited him, after all he had endured and undergone, that he fell prone on his face and scarcely remembered more, as they closed in wild tumult around him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BIRTHDAY GIFT.

‘**T**WA heads are better than ane, though they are but sheep’s anes,’ remarked Archie Auchindoir, with a smirk on his wrinkled face, to old Mrs. Prune, as he gave her a lesson in the art of cooking mutton to imitate venison, with minced onions and ham, parsely and port wine, to please the fastidious palate of his ailing master Sir Ranald, who dearly doted on many things he could not procure now, and of course longed for venison. So these two old servitors were again to their joy installed with the little household once more at Chilcote.

And most welcome again to Alison was

old silver-haired Archie, with his genuine ancient Scottish fidelity 'to the auld family'—a species of fidelity as beautiful and unselfish as it is rare now-a-days.

Mr. Solomon Slagg had failed to let Chilcote; the ruse under which Sir Ranald and Cadbury had lured Alison to accompany them in a sudden departure from England in the *Firefly* had failed, so there was no reason why they should not return; thus Sir Ranald and his daughter had returned accordingly.

Daisy Prune's mother had soon restocked the hen-house, and her old occupations came pleasantly back to Alison. At present she was full of one thing and another; home was home again; her plants, her greenhouse, her flowers occasioned many a deep consultation with the factotum of the establishment, old Archie, anent slips, bulbs, and seedlings, for her love of flowers amid all her cares and anxieties had never deserted her.

So father and daughter were back again to homelier fare than that of the Hôtel St. Antoine, for their dessert after dinner, if served upon the scanty remains of ancient plate, often consisted of only two bald dishes of oranges and a few little biscuits.

In her singleness and simplicity of heart, Alison rejoiced to be again amid her familiar surroundings, as she was destitute of her father's spirit of futile repining and regrets for the unattainable; thus every bit of furniture looked an old friend, more particularly those relics of Essilmont, the family portraits, some of which—especially those of two handsome cavalier brothers who fell in battle for King Charles—seemed to the girl's fancy to relax their haughty features, and smile a welcome home to her—the last of the Cheynes—as she nestled with one of Mudie's last novels in her favourite window-seat and strove to read, while her thoughts wandered to Bevil Goring, wherever he might be, and she pined for him, but in vain.

Lord Cadbury was in town just then. Her father had not seen fit to enlighten her as to the circumstance of Goring having followed them to Antwerp, a fact which would have enhanced his interest in the eyes of Alison. Of the Cadbury episode, and the meeting which never came off at the Lunette St. Laurent, he knew nothing; but he was old-fashioned enough and high-spirited enough to have revolted at such cowardice, if he had been aware of it.

Alison speculated deeply. If Bevil Goring was in England, how was it that he made no effort to trace her? Could it be that stung by her father's imperious manner, and hopeless of ever being rich enough to please him, he had relinquished her and her love, and perhaps given himself up to the adoration of another? She had heard and read of such things, and these surmises saddened and agitated her.

Laura had left Chilcote Grange, none knew for where, thus Alison could not

learn from her any knowledge of Goring's movements, or whether he was at the camp, or in Africa. She was, in her isolation, without the means of knowing if he were in the land of the living.

So she was back again to Chilcote and monotony, but a monotony that was not without an infusion of hope that she might ere long hear something of her lover; for Chilcote and its vicinity were full of associations connected with him, particularly their trysting-place, the old beeches that were leafless still, and looked so lonely when she lingered there, and watched the brown rabbits scudding among the last year's ferns; back again to old Mrs. Prune's frugal repasts, and watching for letters that never came, or those that were not wanted—letters in blue envelopes, at the sight of which Sir Ranald shivered. He hated all letters; of what use were they to anyone—all he wanted was his morning paper.

Severely ailing now, the old man had

become more querulous than ever, and more than ever was Alison sweet in temper, gentle and patient with him, for she had more than an intuition that she would not have him long with her, and when he passed away what was to become of her *then*?

And she would look up beseechingly at the portraits of the two brothers—the Ranald and Ellon of other times—as if seeking succour or counsel from them.

‘I wish I had been born, papa, when these two kinsmen lived, and when the world was younger,’ she said one day.

‘A strange thought for a young girl,’ he replied; ‘if you had been born then you would have lived in stormy times, and, instead of living now, be lying in St. Mary’s Kirk at Ellon. But why this wish?’

‘Because I think people were truer and more single-hearted then than they are now—more simple, honest, and less inclined to make shams of themselves for appearance sake.’

‘Hum,’ said Sir Ranald, after a pause, during which he had been eyeing her suspiciously through his gold *pince-nez*; ‘have you met anyone during your protracted walk this afternoon?’

‘Whom have I to meet in this lonely place, papa?’ she asked, with a little pang of annoyance in her breast.

‘No one you think worth your attention now, perhaps; but you were most anxious to return here, anyway.’

Alison did not reply, but a sigh escaped her. She had indeed on that afternoon wandered pretty far on the road that led to the distant camp at Aldershot, in the slight hope of meeting *him* of whom her thoughts were full, and to whom—in ignorance of where he was—she feared to write announcing that she was again at Chilcote.

Winter had come and gone while she was at Antwerp; the snowdrops had faded from white to yellow and passed away. The loose petals of the late crocuses, golden and

purple, had also disappeared under the increasing heat of the sunshine; the garden was fragrant with wall-flower and scented jonquils, and as the days began to lengthen the pale primroses came to spot the turf under the old beech-trees, and within the green whorls of leaves. Ere long the hedge-banks were gay with them among the litter of dead foliage, and Alison thought of the days when she was wont to linger and make posies of them as she went to school.

The sum that was to have been settled on Alison in case Bevil fell in the intended duel with Lord Cadbury had not taken any tangible form, as the duel never came off, in the first place, and, in the second, Messrs. Taype, Shawrpe, & Scrawly at that precise time had been unable to discover the actual whereabouts of the young lady; so she was in ignorance of his kind consideration and lover-like generosity, while they waited for fresh instructions.

But, aware that to one so impecunious as Sir Ranald Cheyne money could never come amiss, Bevil Goring contrived, through the Scottish legal agents of the former, to transmit to his bankers for the use of Alison a sum anonymously, or in such a fashion that they could never discover, save from himself, from whom or whence it came.

And the news thereof arrived one morning when the holders of some overdue accounts had been more than usually clamorous for settlement, and Alison had begun to feel once again some of the old emotions of shame and desperation in her heart as in the past, and her eyes were full of unshed tears.

‘What a world it is!’ groaned Sir Ranald.

‘True, papa; yet it is but little we require or wish for.’

‘We can neither have what we require or may wish for, unless—unless——’

‘What, papa?’

‘We have money,’ said he, gloomily.

‘True. Oh, that weary money!’ sighed the girl. ‘However, we have still five pounds in the bank, and in my purse are a sovereign and some silver.’

‘My poor, obstinate pet! How easily all this might be amended! A dun, of course,’ he added, as the postman’s rat-tat was heard at the door, and Archie brought in a letter. ‘Ah! I thought so,’ muttered the poor baronet, as he saw that the envelope was a blue one. ‘Throw it in the fire; they are all alike.’

However, with a snort of impatience, he opened the missive, and as he read it Alison, who was watching his thin face with affectionate anxiety, saw an expression of blank wonder, of utter amazement, steal over it. He started, and, as if he could not believe his eyes, wiped his *pince-nez* with his handkerchief and read the letter again, while Alison, whose birthday it was, and who sighed a little because there was no one to remember it, stole to his side and

peeped over his shoulder. It was from the secretary of Sir Ranald's bank, to announce that, by some friend unknown, £1,000 had been paid in the name of Miss Alison Cheyne for her use and behoof, and as a *birthday* gift.

Surprise profound and great joy were the first emotions of father and daughter, and the latter thought of all the little debts it would clear and the comforts it would procure for the former; but neither had the slightest suspicion of the real donor, for Goring was supposed to have little more than his pay, and both were inclined to accredit Lord Cadbury with it; thus for a time a perilous emotion of deep gratitude began really to fill the affectionate heart of Alison—we say perilous, for it enhanced the prospects of the peer, and might eventually blight those of Goring, if aught occurred to make Alison question his truth or loyalty to herself, and yet her heart shrank with shame at taking a money gift from her rejected lover.

A birthday gift, she thought ; Lord Cadbury did not know her birthday. Bevil did ; but of course this princely and certainly opportune present could never come from poor Bevil, who was thankful to add to his income by slaving as a musketry instructor.

Beyond Cadbury conjecture was endless.

‘Can it be from Captain Llanyard?’ she suggested.

‘Absurd!’ said her father, almost angrily.

Tom Llanyard, she knew with all a pretty girl’s sharp intuition, had admired her greatly and secretly during the brief voyage in the *Firefly*, and Tom, we are glad to record, had, singular to say, in one day realised a handsome fortune.

Alison knew of that circumstance, and she knew too that Cadbury was too innately vulgar not to be ostentatious with his wealth and disinclined to hide his candle under a bushel.

Tom Llanyard, with the *Firefly*, when taking her to Cowes by Lord Cadbury's orders, had been blown by a foul wind, and in a heavy gale thereof, down the Channel till he was off the coast of Devonshire, where he fell in with a large derelict Indiaman, which had been abandoned by her captain and crew during the gale, and of which he took possession.

He brought her into Dartmouth safely, and she proved to be laden with teakwood, rum, and a cargo valued generally at nearly £100,000, consequently the salvage alone proved a handsome fortune to worthy Tom Llanyard, who immediately resigned 'the honour' of commanding Lord Cadbury's yacht.

The proud spirit of Alison revolted, on consideration, at the idea of accepting or using this money; but her father only asked her how they were to 'rub on' without it, now it had come?

But whence came it? Was it sent in

charity, or was it the conscience money of some false friend, who in the spendthrift past time had wronged her father on the turf or elsewhere?

To soothe her, he was not disinclined to adopt this view of the matter; but to suit his own views he again fell back upon the conviction that the donor could be no other than Lord Cadbury, to return it to whom would be an insult, and whom it would be but proper to thank in some fashion.

Thus, great was the surprise of the peer to receive one day at his club a rather effusive letter from Alison, dictated by Sir Ranald to thank him for the birthday gift—as they could not doubt—a gift that nothing but her father's failing health, and the many necessities that it involved, compelled her to accept. Her little hands trembled as she closed this—to her—obnoxious epistle; while her eyes were dim with tears, and her heart wrung with shame and pride, all the more so as she painfully recalled the

episode of Mr. Slagg and the acceptances.

Cadbury was puzzled sorely; he knew not what to think, and tugged away at his long white moustache, while thinking '*who* the devil can have sent this money—a thousand pounds too!'

He was not sorry that they should think the gift came from him.

'Hang it all!' he muttered, 'have I not spent ever so much more on and about her—Slagg's devilish bills too—and all for nothing!'

So he wrote a very artful answer, expressing his surprise that he should be thanked for such a trifle, thus fully permitting her to infer that the gift was a kindness of his own; and more than ever did Alison feel a humiliation, in which her father—selfish with all his pride—had no share, especially when sipping some very choice dry cliquot '*veuve*,' a case of which he had ordered on the head of it, and thought that for a little time at least he

had bidden good-bye to *mouton à la Russe*, cold beef, and apple-dumpling—ugh!

At his club and elsewhere in London, Cadbury had a nervous fear of the Antwerp affair, and the cause of his sudden departure from that city, oozing out. It might find its way from the *Rag*, of which he doubted not Goring was a member, but Cadbury forgot that the former was too much of a gentleman to tell any anecdote that would involve the name of a lady—more than all, that of Alison Cheyne.

But no one can tell how stories get about in these days, and thus, when there was any low-voiced talk or laughter in a corner of the club-room, he grew hot and cold with the terrible suspicion that he was the subject of both. His hatred of Goring grew deeper, and he resolved that he would work him some fatal mischief, if he could.

Through Sir Jasper Dehorsey and Mr. Tom Hawksleigh, a rumour certainly was spread abroad that he had been on the Con-

continent 'with such a stunning girl;' and old Cad (as he was often called) was rather inclined to adopt the soft impeachment, and the idea that 'he was a dog—a gay spark yet—and all that sort of thing, don't you know.'

But when Dehorsey spoke of the affair, he little knew the rank, position, or character of the girl he referred to, and the risks she had run through the brutal selfishness and mischievous spirit of himself and Hawksleigh, when by falsehoods, and in her confusion, they had lured her to the *Café au Progrès*.

At Chilcote, Archie Auchindoir speedily became master of the news concerning the birthday gift.

'A thousand pounds, my certie, is there as much money in a' the warld!' he exclaimed. 'Troth, Sir Ranald, he that hath routh o' butter may put it on baith sides o' his bannock.'

'I don't know,' said Sir Ranald, peevishly, to Alison, 'why I brought that fellow

back again. A Caleb Balderstone is an anachronism in nineteenth century society.'

'He is so good and faithful, papa—dear old Archie.'

'Yes; but, like all such faithful old fellows, he is a shocking tyrant—is too much *au fait* at all one's private affairs, and deems himself quite a family institution—as much a Cheyne as ourselves.'

But Alison had not the heart to resent Archie's gladness that the gift—whoever it came from—'would keep the wolf from the door,' as she thought it might keep the black hound too!

Archie had a profound dislike of Lord Cadbury, and once he ventured to say to Alison,

'Wi' a' his wealth, I'd as soon see you in your coffin as the Leddy o' Cadbury Court; but anent this,' he asked, abruptly, in a low voice, 'where is Captain Goring?'

Alison coloured, but said, in a low, cooing voice,

‘Could you find out for me, Archie, like an old dear, as you are?’

‘I will—I’ll ask at the Camp, if I tramp every yard o’ the way and back again.’

‘Oh, thank you so much, Archie.’

‘I would like to see you married to him, missie,’ said the old man, patting her shoulder.

‘Ah, we are too poor yet, Archie,’ said Alison, but the next remark, while it made her laugh, brought a hot blush to her cheek.

‘Owre pair! Hoot, fye! Think o’ a Cheyne o’ Essilmont saying that—Essilmont where mony a time a hundred o’ your name and mair have had their horses in stall—ilk man boden in effeir o’ war?’ exclaimed Archie, his old grey eyes flashing as he spoke. ‘No—it is feeding little mouths ye think o’; but, odds sake, Miss Alison, they’d bring mair gowd in their yellow curls than they’d ever tak’ frae ye in bannocks and shoon. God never sends a little mouth into this world without food for it; and, if it is a certain care, it is a sure joy.’

So Archie soon discovered that Bevil Goring was not at Aldershot, and, to Alison's joy, that he had not gone to Africa; that the spring drills had not yet commenced, that the battalion was returning home, and that Captain Goring was in London, where, she concluded, he must be idling in ignorance of her movements, and that she was again at Chilcote.

The year of their mutual promise was already passing away. But what did that matter? Never would they love each other the less!

How she longed once again to see Laura Dalton, whose new name and strange story had reached her through the vicar, and amazed her greatly, for she had a sorrowful sense of isolation and helplessness, and this darkened more around her, while heavy illness once more fell upon Sir Ranald, and again the terror came over her that his life would slowly ebb away.

The scathing bitterness of his tongue

when he spoke of Goring often made her heart wince, but could provoke no response from her lips, though they often quivered with indignation at his querulous spite. Though Alison was a woman in energy of purpose and power of endeavour, in many ways she was still like the veriest child—especially in so far as a spirit of reasonable obedience to Sir Ranald went; and after all, as a writer has it, even in these our days ‘such monsters as parents indefinitely relentless will sometimes outrage dramatic proprieties;’ so Alison pondered much upon her future, but failed to see a clue to it.

In her present small world she had but one little pleasure—her letters from her namesake, Sister Lisette, the Beguine, full of prayerful wishes, loving expressions, and pretty messages, and often containing little religious pictures, with gracefully worded mementoes in Latin and French.

And thus the days stole away at Chilcote.

CHAPTER IX.

CADBURY REDIVIVUS.

UNABASHED by Alison's steady rejection of his suit, encouraged by the countenance given him by Sir Ranald, who had narrated to him in a letter written in his now feeble and scrawly hand all that had occurred subsequently to his missing Alison in Antwerp, and more than ever encouraged by the latter's missive with reference to the mysterious birthday gift, Lord Cadbury had the bad taste to resume his old footing of more than visitor, and attended by Gaskins, who had now completely recovered, he rode over almost daily from the Court to Chilcote, and was wont to linger long, to the great annoyance

of Alison, though Sir Ranald, more ailing and querulous than ever, lay frequently a-bed till nearly noon.'

Aware of the trick it could be proved he had, in a spirit of malevolence rather than to serve his master, played Bevil Goring in Antwerp, and his confession thereof in a moment of agony, weakness, and terror, when believing himself to be dying in the Belgian hospital, the rascal Gaskins was very loth to venture within twenty miles of Aldershot camp; but, while believing certainly that the wronged officer of the Rifles would never be at Cadbury Court, he was less sure that he might not fall upon him in the vicinity of Chilcote; thus he was greatly relieved when, in reply to some casual remarks, he elicited from Archie that Captain Goring was in London.

So Gaskins felt his shoulders safe as yet.

'Our fare is no gude enough nae doubt for a gentleman like you, Mr. Gaskins,' said Archie, as he ushered the dandified

groom (whose surtout was girt by a waist-belt and garnished with a rosebud button-hole) into the kitchen, his whole face wearing a contemptuous smirk the while; 'but we can aye gi'e a bane o' cauld beef to pyke, wi' a farl o' breid and a cogie o' gude yill, and they are better, ye ken, than sowans, ill-soured, ill-sauted, and sodden.'

'What the dooce is he saying, Mrs. Prune?' asked Mr. Gaskins, in sore perplexity, as he carefully wiped his cockaded hat with a white handkerchief.

'Ye kenna what I am saying?' asked Archie, with contemptuous surprise.

'No, Mr. Hackindore, you must excuse me really.'

'Out of the world and into Kippen?' said Archie, with a toss of his head.

'And how is Sir Ranald, Mrs. Prune?' asked Gaskins.

'The laird is a wee thing dwining again,' said Archie, ere she could reply.

'They say aye ailin' ne'er fills the kirk-

yard ; but I'm fearsome at times this is the last blaze o' the candle in the socket,' he added, with a little break in his voice.

On the day of this visit Sir Ranald was not visible at all, and Lord Cadbury had Alison all to himself in the little drawing-room, where he was fast resuming his old airs of property and protection, and almost venturing to make what he deemed love in dull and emotionless tones ; and Alison, had she not been grieved by her father's condition, and worried by the whole situation, might have laughed at Cadbury's Don Juanesque posing as too absurd.

'I shall never be able to describe to you,' said he, for the tenth time, 'my profound alarm and grief when I lost you so mysteriously at Antwerp.'

'In a place to which I should never have gone.'

'Not even with *me*?' he asked, softly.

'Not even with you ; but I was weary, triste—glad to do anything to forget my

own thoughts; but as for your friend Captain Smith——’

‘Alison—my dear Miss Cheyne—how often am I to assure you that I know of no such man? If he was a Captain, in presuming to call himself a friend of mine, and acting as he did, he deserved the most severe punishment; and let me assure you that as we were in Belgium I should have lost no time in inviting him to breathe the morning air on the ramparts, or anywhere else,’ added Cadbury, in a valiant tone, even while wincing at the recollection of the invitation he had received for a similar ‘breather’ in the Lunette St. Laurent.

‘I thought duels were as much out of fashion as hoops, patches, and hair powder,’ said Alison, with a little mockery in her tone.

‘So did I, by Jove,’ responded Cadbury, with some fervour in his tone. Then he added—‘And so Sir Ranald will not appear to-day?’

‘No—he is too unwell, and it is only when

I think of his condition,' said Alison, with a quiver of her sweet lip and downcast eyelashes, 'I feel such gratitude to the donor of my birthday gift—it has given me so many things for papa that, I am not ashamed to say, I could never have procured.'

'And you have got no certainty of *who* sent it to you?' asked Cadbury, with a curious and very artful modulation of voice, as he slightly patted her hand.

'No—though I may strongly suspect,' replied Alison, while a painful kind of blush suffused her pale cheek.

'Suspect! can't you guess, rather?'

'Unless—it was you—or the kindest of friends.'

'I do not admit quite that it was; but—'

'Admission or not, it *was* you,' said Alison, with emotions of gratitude and humiliation struggling in her proud heart, while her beautiful eyes looked shrinkingly upward to his; 'but, oh, my heart tells me, with fear, that it may have come too late—too late.'

‘Do not say so,’ replied Cadbury, in his kindest tone. ‘If I have not graces of the person to recommend me,’ he added, in a low voice, ‘I have—it is admitted—great wealth; if that will make you happy, it is yours—and *his*.’

‘I cannot love you for what you may have, and you cannot love me for what I have only got—a loveless heart.’

‘But I may love you for what you *are*. There is a writer who tells that “it is finer to be loved for what you are than for what you have got,” because the looks and money often run away, but *you* remain—unless you die, that is to say.’

‘Again this detestable subject!’ thought Alison.

‘I pity the loneliness of the life you lead here,’ said he, ‘with your birds, fowls, and flowers only as your companions.’

‘And better to me as such, than some people can ever be.’

Cadbury was silent. There was the old

dangerous glitter in his ferret-like eyes, and he tugged at his long white moustachios, but ere he could resume, Alison said,

‘Excuse me, I must go to papa; I am sure I heard his bell.’

So the peer withdrew, only to come next day in ‘his anxiety about the health of his old friend.’

With poor Alison it was too often a case of ‘out of Scylla and into Charybdis,’ as her father generally resumed precisely where Cadbury left off.

‘Is he gone?’ asked Sir Ranald, taking her hand in his thin, wasted, diaphanous fingers, and patting it tenderly on the coverlet of his bed.

‘Who, papa?’

‘Cadbury. I would speak to you about him again.’

She made a little impatient and disdainful *moue* at the name, but her father, heedless of it, resumed—

‘In the winter of my days I have been

compelled to bury myself, and you too, darling, in this dead-alive, man-forgotten place—Chilcote; but I shall soon be out of it, and you—my poor child—you—you——’

His voice failed him, and Alison’s heart failed her too as he spoke in this pitiful strain.

‘As for loving Lord Cadbury,’ said Alison, with a voice that seemed full of tears, ‘do not talk to me of that when you are so ill and feeble, as it wrings my very soul to oppose you. I may—nay, I must—be grateful for the service his money gift——’

‘Say gifts, Alison.’

‘Well, gifts have done for you; but I can do no more, my dislike of him is so intense and rooted.’

‘Dislike! The proverb has it that a woman’s dislike is only love turned inside out; and he loves you so! Think of his coronet.’

‘A new one—the gilt not even worn by time—a parvenu coronet.’

‘Well,’ said her father, impatiently, ‘it will

be old in time ; and does not the land teem with parvenu baronets ? They are thick as blackberries now !

And Alison was thankful when he dropped asleep, and she was left to her own aching thoughts, and released from the hateful subject for a time.

When a man of Cadbury's age and proclivities conceives a fancy for a girl, he is usually terribly in earnest about it ; but ' of that delicious agony—that glorious fear—which makes pallid the face of the lover—the void in life which must be filled up by a beloved woman—what did he know ?

Nothing—or what had he ever known, old *vaurien* as he was ?

In short, he came now, not to watch or hope for recovery, but to learn how *ill* Sir Ranald was becoming—the sooner the latter was gone the better for his schemes. The baronet had altered greatly for the worse in his mysterious and complicated ailment, and the doctors who came—and, thanks to

the birthday gift of Alison, she had secured the best medical attendance—shook their heads gravely when they saw him ; but not in her presence, as, with professional humanity, they wished to spare the poor girl any unnecessary pain.

Cadbury often reflected with genuine anger on how his plans for separating Alison from her father on the Continent, that he might both compromise and have her at his mercy, had failed ; and that he had barely won, by any pretence, even her gratitude. He had spent ‘ a devil of a lot of money—even thousands one way or other,’ and was no nearer his end than before—fair means or foul.

He had, moreover, been dreadfully insulted at the Hôtel St. Antoine, ‘ by that cad Goring,’ and even put in terror of his precious life ! And were all these to go for nothing ?

Never, perhaps, since Time was born did a coward forgive the man who unmasked,

affronted him, or did him dishonour in every way ; thus more than ever was Cadbury rancorous at Bevil Goring, and resolved to revenge himself, through the means of Alison Cheyne, if he could.

‘As for Goring,’ said he, on one occasion to Sir Ranald; ‘we know nothing of him save that he bears a commission, which any fellow who can pass the necessary exams. can get now ; but as to who he is, or where he comes from, I don’t suppose he could very clearly tell himself.’

Sir Ranald, though somewhat rancorous in regard to his friend’s rival, was patrician enough to think such remarks unnecessary, and only answered by a kind of sniff. He knew, on one hand, that Goring used the arms of the Sussex Gorings, a chevron between two annulets, dating from the first Edward, while Lord Cadbury was what the Scots call a ‘gutter blood,’ whose father, the alderman, had, as recorded by Debrett, been the first esquire of his race ‘by Act of Parliament.’

As for Alison, while undemonstrative, she was passionate as Juliet, soft and tender as Cordelia, yet none of the bloom had been taken off her young heart by that playing at love which is known as flirtation, 'ere life-time and love-time were one.' Alison, perhaps, never knew what it was, and thus the full harvest of her heart and soul had gone forth to Bevil Goring, and she felt that, if *he* failed her, life would 'have no more to bring but mockeries of the past.'

She knew—with terror and foreboding of woe—that the great and coming crisis in that life would be her father's death. She had learned now to look that matter in the face, and pondered thereon.

Then the winning ways and sweetly placid features of Sister Lisette Gabion—features that Fra Angelica might have painted with joy—would come back vividly to memory ; and with them she recalled the peaceful calm of existence in the Beguinage of Antwerp, where no sound came from the world

without but the bells that called to prayer and the sweet carillons of the great cathedral tower ; and many times there were when she wondered, if Bevil failed her, could she find a shelter there ?

For already somehow he seemed to have passed out of her life, though daily she kissed the engagement ring he had placed upon her mystic finger.

‘Papa dead, I shall have no present and no future,’ wailed the girl in her heart, ‘and what will become of me ?’

What if she had to go down into the ranks of that great army which toils for daily bread ? And with whom and in what fashion would she earn it ? Thoughts like these were corrodingly bitter for a girl so young and beautiful, so delicate and tenderly nurtured, as Alison Cheyne of Essilmont !

CHAPTER X.

AT CAPE COAST.

‘**W**HAT is he—who is he?’ asked the voice of one in authority, of one evidently used to command, and who was on horseback.

‘An officer of the Rifle Brigade, sir,’ replied another.

‘Dead, of course?’

‘No, sir, but half dead of famine apparently. He looks pale enough, and his haversack is empty.’

‘How comes he to be here, and alone? Poor fellow, he must have fallen out on Sir Garnet’s line of march, and been left in the rear.’

Such were the welcome utterances in

English which Jerry Wilmot heard with joy and astonishment, as, weakly and voiceless, he struggled up on his hands and arms, and looked around him again, to find a mounted officer stooping from his saddle, regarding him with interest and curiosity, while twenty armed natives of a savage and foreign race jabbered and gesticulated violently as they lifted him from the ground, and the other European who had spoken applied a flask of brandy to his lips—a requisite stimulant, of which Jerry partook gratefully, while joy gushed up in his heart to find that he was, so far as he could see, saved.

And now to account for this mystery.

It is well known that four days after the destruction of Coomassie, that city of wigwams in a woody wilderness, a single British officer, attended by only twenty African soldiers, rode through the still smouldering ruins, and found no inhabitants remaining.

This officer was Captain Reginald Sar-

torius, of the 6th Bengal Cavalry, who had been sent by Captain Glover, R.N., to report to Sir Garnet Wolseley that he was advancing, and was now within eighteen miles of the city with his subordinate column, the operations of which lie somewhat apart from our story, though we may briefly state that 'the original scheme, and the elaborate attempt of a campaign starting from the Volta river, with from ten thousand to fifteen thousand warriors of several nations, had not indeed been carried out. The native kings had willingly accepted British money, and flint-lock muskets for their men; but their idea of invading Ashantee was to go away in another direction, and make war on people out of the Gold Coast Protectorate, and beyond the range of its policy. Neither at Addah nor at Accra could we get a real hold of the allies, upon whom Captain Glover had reckoned. He had, therefore, been instructed by Sir Garnet to conduct his own reliable force of

Houssas and Yorabas by a given route across the Prah, and join our main body at Coomassie.'

In obedience to orders, and to report the approach of this force, at mid-day on the 10th of February Captain Sartorius, starting from a point which he believed to be only seven miles distant from that place, began one of the most daring rides recorded in the annals of war, and for which he won deservedly the Victoria Cross.

Certain of meeting Sir Garnet at Coomassie, he departed without provisions, and, after a rough ride of eleven miles through a wild and terrible country, he found himself when night fell at a village seven miles distant from it. There strange and startling rumours prevailed among the women, for the men had all gone elsewhere. Coomassie, they told him, was no more, and its destroyers had departed.

Captain Sartorius sent messengers to Captain Glover, stating that Sir Garnet

would only be a day's march off, and could easily be overtaken ; but these messengers were fired on in the bush, and no tidings reached the naval officer.

Moving on with caution, next day Sartorius approached Coomassie, which was still shrouded in clouds of dark smoke, amid which the red flames were smouldering, and was met by a woman, who informed him that 'the king and all his young warriors were in the town raging over its destruction, and vowing vengeance for it.' Three houses alone had escaped the conflagration.

Aware that scant mercy would be shown to him and his twenty brave followers if taken, he quickly left that place of horrors behind him. Believing that he was now equi-distant between Captain Glover and Sir Garnet, he bravely resolved to follow up the latter, a fortunate circumstance for the luckless Jerry Wilmot, who was found in the very track his party was pursuing.

'Come, my good friend,' said he, after he

had heard Jerry's story in a few words, 'you must pull yourself together and make an effort, as we must push on without a moment's delay.'

An effort—yes, thought Jerry gleefully, though he was weak, faint, and feverish, for his adventures in the moist and pestiferous bush were telling on him now. But for the advent of Captain Sartorius, what must his fate inevitably have been? He was mounted on the horse of a messenger, who had been shot in the bush, and now rode on with his rescuers. The sheet of water which had barred his way so long they forded, the water rising to their saddle-girths, and then they pushed on, hoping to reach the bridge constructed by our engineers across the Ordah. It had been swept away! But the waters which destroyed it had subsided, and where that waste of water, so troublesome to our troops, once rolled, the ground was dry and even hard, but the odours that loaded the air from the bodies of the slain

Ashantees lying in the bush, left Captain Sartorius and his companions in no doubt of their being on the line of march followed by Sir Garnet Wolseley.

Poor Jerry had felt himself like one in an evil dream when he found his limbs so powerless that he was incapable of resistance and sinking on the earth. Now he felt also in a dream, and could scarcely realise that he was mounted, with friends and on the homeward way, for he was half dead with weakness, and, if not rescued when he was, he must have succumbed very soon after. Keenly had he realised the fact that

‘Past and to come seem best, things present *worst*.’

Some one proffered him a cigar—a luxury, to a smoker a necessity—which he had been without for days, and he took it thankfully, gratefully, and never did he forget the pleasure that cigar afforded him; but the toil of the journey, after all the blood he had lost and all the mental and bodily

suffering he had undergone, told sorely upon the nerves and system of Jerry, though a hardy and active young Englishman, who had never figured second in the hunting or cricket fields, had been stroke oar of the Oxford boat, and up to everything in the way of sport that was manly and stirring. But he dug his knees into his saddle, and even when his head, through very weakness, was almost bowed on his horse's mane, he thought of Bella Chevenix, and bravely, as he phrased it, 'strove to keep up his pecker.'

So onward the party progressed amid scenery clothed with strange trees, strange flowers, and gigantic plants, with long spiky blade-like leaves, such as we only see in a botanical garden at home.

There was a lurid sunset, and the hills were as those of heaven, as described by Dante, 'like sun-illumined gold,' when the party of Sartorius drew near Amoaful, scaring away all Ashantees who approached

him, and then when night fell he came upon a wounded Houssa who had fought against us, but gave him the pleasant intelligence that the British troops were at no great distance—at Fomannah—where Sir Garnet halted four days, and messengers came from the King of Ashantee with 1,000 ounces of gold, and the latter received a treaty of peace in return.

The lonely march was resumed in the morning, and at Fomannah Jerry Wilmot and Sartorius, with his twenty men, after having marched, each with arms and forty rounds of ammunition, for fifty-five miles, overtook the retiring troops of Sir Garnet Wolseley.

Jerry now had 'that ugly knock on his scone,' as he called it, properly dressed and attended to by the medical staff, in whose hands he found poor Dalton done nigh unto death by wounds, and borne among the sick in a hammock, and ere long Jerry was the occupant of another, pros-

trated by fever, and unconscious of most that followed.

Oblivious of the struggle of the night march to the village of Akanquassie, through a moonless, starless, and pitchy blackness never equalled ; through a swamp, over a precipitous hill, and anon through a forest, where every moment one ran against a tree, had the helmet knocked off by a bough, the face scratched by twigs and spiky shrubs, or the foot stumbled over a great gnarled root ; yet the voices of the officers and men rang cheerily out as they encouraged each other.

‘Close up—close up. Now then, my lads!’

‘This way—this way. Look out!’

‘For what?’

‘A deep pool of water.’

‘Mind that root ! mind that branch !’

‘Hurrah, lads ! Forward !’

And as the dawn stole in the men of the 1st West Indian Regiment, who escorted

the party of sick in hammocks, seemed to Jerry's eyes most ghastly in their light grey clothing and white helmets ; and it was said that 'the negro so dressed looked like a convict who had been hung until black in the face and cut down.'

And often as he tossed in his hammock, which was slung on a pole dhooley-wise, he would mutter,

'Oh, if Dalton had only let that — beetle alone !'

Cape Coast Castle was reached by the entire force in pretty good condition ; but, as an idea of the extent to which fever had raged among them, we may mention that of the Naval Brigade, which, including marines, landed two hundred and seventy-eight strong, there came back only one hundred and nineteen men.

All the rest had found their last homes in the awful solitude of the untrodden bush.

Apart from sorrow lest he should never more see Laura and his little daughter so

lately found and known, Dalton had a great horror of finding such a tomb, and being left so far away; and the funeral of a brother officer, Captain H——, who had died at Essiman of fever, haunted him like a dream.

He remembered how the forest re-echoed to the three death volleys over the lonely grave, which lay in a beautiful spot, certainly so far as tropical flowers and foliage went, and had as a headstone a stately cotton-tree; but ages may elapse ere the foot of a white man treads near it again.

All the fire of the soldier seemed to have gone out of Tony Dalton; and for a time only the ailing and pitiful invalid remained; and he longed intensely for the presence and the ministering tenderness of the brilliant Laura—more perhaps to feel in his the little white hand of Netty—the *enfant terrible* of the past time at Chilcote Grange.

Genuine hope first expanded the hearts of Dalton and Jerry, and in the hearts of

many more, when they heard the pipes of the Black Watch strike up—

‘Oh, why left I my hame?

Why did I cross the deep?’

announcing that the white walls of Cape Coast Castle were in sight, rising apparently sheer out of the jungle, and that beyond them lay our stately ships of war, and the free rolling waves of the blue highway that led to home and ‘Old England.’

‘Rescued, safe, spared to see the white cliffs again—home and Bella!’ murmured Jerry.

Of his mother, though a warm-hearted fellow, he scarcely thought, or if so, it was in this fashion :

‘By nature icy, with all her beauty and pride of place, she is my mother, true ; but what has she done for me? As a child, she never caressed me, as other fellows’ mothers did—no, by Jove, nor tucked me in my little bed, nor gave me toys or sweets. Did I ever see her read her Bible in church, or teach

me to say a prayer at her knee? She only cared to see me prettily dressed, that I might outshine other women's children, but left me otherwise to hang as I grew; and, by Jove, it is a wonder I didn't grow up a worse fellow than I have done!

With half a world of waters between them, these were hard thoughts for a son to have of his mother; but Lady Wilmot had inspired them herself.

Both Dalton and Jerry were in such a bad plight from their wounds, and the latter especially from exposure in the bush, that the doctors doubted much if they would 'pull through' after the embarkation, as they were ever and anon tossing on the troubled tide of a jungle-fever that threatened to bear them both away to the shores of 'the Promised Land,' with a grave in the tropical sea.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD WARNING.

FONDLY had Alison Cheyne looked forward to her return to Chilcote, as a chance of reunion with Bevil Goring, as the means to a probable end of taking up the link of their love where it had last been dropped ; and now she had to content herself with the scanty intelligence gathered by Archie among the soldiers of his regiment, that he was not in the camp—was in London, but none knew in what part thereof.

In London, thought Alison, and making apparently no effort to write, or to discover her ; but she forgot that he must be utterly ignorant of her movements ; whether she was at home or abroad ; and that she could

now receive letters freely and unquestioned, as her father was all but bed-ridden again.

Her bubble seemed to be bursting; and this state of affairs—nothing—was the end of it, after all !

Thus they were both in painful ignorance of each other's movements amid all the ready appliances of post and telegraph, while Laura Dalton, who would have been a certain means of communication between them, was gone from Chilcote Grange, Alison knew not where, but, as it eventually proved, to Portsmouth to await the returning expedition from the Gold Coast.

So Alison's days were passed in nursing and monotony now, and often she and Mrs. Rebecca Prune had their heads together over a cookery-book, studying the decoction or preparation of something 'for papa'—to tempt his appetite; for often *he* had one dish and Alison another of a more homely kind, or next to none, and though he might have a dainty spring chicken she dared not

kill her hens, they were laying so well just then.

Sir Ranald had become, as Lord Cadbury remarked rather unfeelingly to Alison, 'deuced stupid and snoozy now.'

On an evening early in March he sat—as Alison long remembered—for the *last* time in his old arm-chair listening to the rooks cawing in the lofty beeches, the sparrows twittering under the eaves, and the setting sun was throwing a golden glory over the eastern uplands and a ruddy gleam on the square, ivyed tower of Chilcote Church in the distance; and then, without moving his head, which lay back on a pillow, his eyes, clear and keen though sunken, through the *pince-nez* balanced on his long thin nose, regarded lovingly and affectionately, the downcast face of Alison, whose pretty hands were adjusting in a vase some fragrant March violets that Archie had brought her—violets which, as Shakespeare says, are 'sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes.'

Once upon a time Sir Ranald had found it a burden—a bore to sign a cheque, to read a letter, or see his lawyer when he had a land steward ; now there were no cheques to sign, no letters to read save those of duns, and no lawyer to see, or land steward either ; and now, for the last time he began to harp upon the old string, when she kissed him, and asked him of what he was thinking.

‘Of what can I think save your future, Alison ? who cares what becomes of *mine*—little as there is left of it, and tired as I am of a life that is too intolerable to be endured for one’s-self alone !’ was the querulous response.

Alison with difficulty restrained her tears, and in a mechanical way re-adjusted the bouquet of violets.

‘Girls—especially poor ones—have only a certain number of chances, Alison, however handsome and attractive they may be,’ he resumed. ‘You, under great monetary

disadvantages, have had one that is every way unexceptionable. What more do you want—what more can you want?’ he added, rocking his bald head from side to side, and closing his eyes wearily.

Alison thought she had had *two* chances, and the most prized of them was now a richer offer than she ever deemed it could be ; but this was the one her father chose to ignore as no chance at all.

‘I have read, papa,’ said she, ‘that those “who have neither character nor conscience may drift, or let others shape the course for them ; but the great thing is to be true to yourself.” ’

‘Yourself—and some penniless cur, like that at Aldershot ! Go—I am disgusted !’ exclaimed Sir Ranald, with a sudden gush of querulous anger.

Alison remained silent. She knew not that the fatal end was drawing so near now, otherwise she must have temporised with him more ; and she thought—

‘But for my love for Bevil, to please papa I might have yielded—so many girls are drawn or thrust into hateful or grotesque marriages by want of money, friends, or a home.’

But when she thought this, Alison was ignorant of what so many knew, and her father should have known—the private character of Lord Cadbury, or rather his want of it, as he was simply an old *vaurien*.

‘Novels have turned your head, Alison,’ said Sir Ranald, in a low voice. ‘You expect to be over head and ears—of a necessity—in love with a hero ; well,’ he added, through his set teeth, ‘this fellow Goring is not one—didn’t he shirk the Ashanti affair?’

‘Oh, papa, how cruel and unjust of you ! He won three medals, and was twice wounded in India.’

‘Ah ! you know all that?’

‘He was “detailed” for the dépôt, as it is called—so Archie told me—and had to remain at home.’

‘Ah ! you know all that too !’ exclaimed her father, weakly, but in a sneering tone.

Why did not Bevil attempt to seek her out ? she thought. Had a change come over his mind and his plans ? and was she left in loneliness to dream over the unattainable ?

‘It is not medals I would have you to set store upon, but money.’

‘I care little about it, papa, and shiver at the name of it.’

‘Perhaps so ; but we ought to care for what money gets us.’

‘Should I accept Lord Cadbury with your permission if he were a poor man ?’

‘Certainly not,’ he replied, snappishly ; ‘even a poor Lord would be no mate for Miss Cheyne of Essilmont—for my daughter !’

‘But if she is poor too ?’

‘Then the greater madness to think of it. But I am weary of this subject.’

‘So indeed am I, papa.’

‘And I am weary of life too—oh, so

weary—but for you, bird Ailie ! Ring for Archie—and—and let me to bed—to bed.’

So he went to his bed that night, and never rose from it, for he was dying—dying partly of a general decay of the whole vital system ; for he was a man who had lived high, and with whom life, if easy in one way, had been a species of feverish chase in another.

In anxious monotony passed the nights and days. Dr. Kneebone, the Esculapius of Chilcote village, could do nothing for him now ; indeed, there seemed nothing to be done but to watch for the end ; and as Alison watched, with a heart torn by anxiety, passionate filial regard, and terror of what must inevitably come, again her sweet face, the softness and delicacy of which the pencil of a Greuze alone could have portrayed, became sad and pale and livid.

Her eyes grew heavy and inflamed by much sleeplessness, and over all her bearing there spread a soft air of patient suffering,

with equal evidence of great resolution and fortitude ; and yet—yet, withal, with a shudder in her heart, times there were when she began to think of sacrificing herself, if doing so could save her father and prolong his days.

And old Archie Auchindoir moaned to himself as he pottered about his daily work, and often he muttered anxiously :

‘It’s no for nocht the gleds whustle at nicht !’

Dying—Dr. Kneebone assured Lord Cadbury that the old man was certainly dying, and fully stronger than ever grew the hopes of the peer to possess Alison, the poor and forlorn, beautiful and hunted creature, in the midst of her coming desolation and loneliness. Genuine pity or commiseration he had none.

‘Save the puir lassie, he is the last o’ the Cheynes o’ Essilmont, my lord,’ said Archie, in a very broken voice, as he ushered the peer out one day ; ‘the last leaf o’ a lang, lang ancestral tree !’

‘What the devil is the use of a family tree unless one could sell it for timber,’ replied the peer, as he took his horse’s reins from Gaskins; ‘and as for ancestors’ (this was rather a sore subject with him), ‘if one could raise the wind on them, there is many a fellow who wouldn’t even leave himself a father just now!’

And so his lordship cantered off, sitting in his saddle, as Archie said, ‘for a’ the world like a pock o’ peats.’

Alison was watching her father sleeping, while this would-be lover rode pleasantly home to his luxurious dinner, and, as she watched him, she thought how fearfully wan and gray his face looked; and yet how noble it was in its manly beauty. What a handsome youth he must have been, when he won her mother’s heart as a girl.

‘How dark it has become!’ she murmured in a low voice, as Archie brought noiselessly in a carefully shaded lamp, ‘and the sunset was so unnaturally bright,’ she added, in a

kind of whisper, with a convulsive trembling of her lips and a strange pitifulness and foreboding in heart as she resumed her seat by the bedside, in shadow.

Dr. Kneebone had looked at the sinking patient for the last time, and departed with a very grave face—grave, for his kindly heart was full of pity for the young girl, who now knew that the great change would come before long.

The vicar of Chilcote had read the prayers for the dying, and not without deep emotion, for he was a warm-hearted old man ; and after placing the book in Alison's hand, with certain pages marked for her perusal, had departed also ; and she—declining all offers of feminine assistance from the vicarage—remained alone, and choked with emotion by the bedside, with one of her father's passive hands clasped in hers, to wait and to watch.

A storm was rising without, but great was the hush of silence in the half-darkened

chamber as the hours of the night stole solemnly on ; and Archie and Mrs. Rebecca Prune, approaching the door on tip-toe, peeped in from time to time, but were always warned away by a wave of Alison's hand.

On the mantelpiece ticked a handsome little carriage clock, one of the few remaining relics of former wealth and luxury ; but the sound it made was soon lost amid the din of the elemental war without. .

Once or twice Alison mechanically turned her pale and hopeless face to the window ; the bare black branches of the great beeches were tossing on the gale, and dark clouds were hurrying past the white, weird disc of the moon ; eerily wailed the blast around the old house, rustling the rain-soaked creepers on its walls, and the great drops swept in gusts upon the rattling window panes.

The patient stirred restlessly ; the din of the rising storm—oh, could she but muffle it, shut it out—disturbed him.

Higher it rose, and with each successive gust of the increasing wind the ivy and creepers rattled on the window panes, whilst the great beeches seemed to shiver in anticipation of a fiercer blast.

For many a year to come would a storm be associated with sorrow, gloom, and death in the mind of Alison Cheyne !

The thunder growled, and more than once a gleam of lightning overspread the northern quarter of the sky, showing the tall trees in black outline tossing their branches wildly.

The sound thoroughly roused Sir Ranald, and recalled his dying energies.

‘Kiss me, bird Ailie—kiss me,’ said he, in a voice like a husky whisper; ‘the light has surely gone out, I cannot see you, child.’

Alas, it was the light of life that had left his eyes for ever !

Alison saw how fixed they were in expression as she kissed him softly, most

tenderly, again and again, and wiped his forehead with her handkerchief. Then, with hands that were tremulous but firm in intent, he drew down the lids of his eyes—as James VI. of Scotland did, with wonderful presence of mind, when dying, and no other man on record—and they never opened again!

Alison thought he was asleep, and listened to his stertorous breathing, while restraining her own; it grew fainter and fainter, but there was a sound in it that is indescribable, though more significant than any other, that a human soul is on the wing; while his shrivelled hand groped feebly and fatuously about the coverlet as if seeking for another; and, taking it between her own, Alison bent her lips over it.

It trembled in her grasp, and when she looked up he had passed away, and an awful placidity lay upon the livid face. At that moment the thunder was grumbling,

and the wind bellowing; so it might be fancy, or it might not, but amid the tumult of sound Alison seemed to hear—what was it?—the wild baying of a hound dying hollowly away in the distance.

‘Oh, my God,’ she exclaimed, and fell prone, face downward, with arms outspread, upon the floor.

The hound—the hound again! Was it fevered fancy? Could she but think she was warring with shadows—but alas, she could not, then at least.

CHAPTER XII.

‘ASHES TO ASHES.’

WHEN she opened her eyes with a sob and a gasp, she found herself in the arms of Archie and Rebecca Prune, and while her little white hand wandered in bewilderment across her brow, she moved her head from side to side, and looked vacantly, wearily, and inquiringly around her.

At last she realised it all, and rushed to the bedside.

‘He has left ye, my bairn,’ said Archie, in a broken voice, ‘but God bides wi’ ye yet.’

‘Oh, papa, come back to me—I cannot live without you, papa! Do not leave me thus, all alone, all alone!’ she wailed out,

as she buried her face in the bedclothes, and threw her arms across the stiffening form, till the old man, by an exertion of strength that was great for his years, bore her bodily away to her own room, and left her there with Mrs. Prune.

Fast as the storm drops without, the tears rolled over her pale cheeks, while she sobbed as though her heart would break ; nor did the kind old woman who hung over her, and caressed her poor aching head by pressing it against her maternal breast, attempt to check Alison's passionate weeping, which proved alike a safety valve to her brain and heart, till, worn out with all she had undergone for days and nights past, a heavy sleep came upon her.

Old Archie hung over her for a minute ere he left her, and thought what a lovely face hers was to look upon, pale and exhausted though it was in expression. The forehead low and broad, the eyebrows dark, yet delicately marked ; the waxen-like eye-

lid fringed by long lashes that lay lightly on the cheek ; the rosebud mouth so full of sweetness and decision.

We must hasten over this gloomy portion of our story, and get, with Alison, into the busy world once more, for her father's death led to many changes.

In connection with that event, the real or fancied sound she had heard preyed deeply on her mind, and the only person to whom she could speak, brokenly and with quivering lips, on the subject—Archie Auchindoir—believed in the existence of the supernatural so thoroughly that he left nothing unsaid to confirm her in the belief.

All people are now incredulous of everything, and to none other but Bevil Goring would she have spoken on the subject—and yet with her it had much of the superstition of the heart in it. Men of science assert that there is no evidence that the ordinary course of nature is ever interrupted. According to their theories, 'there never have

been, there are not now, and there never will be, either miracles or opposition. Between the orthodox, who doubt modern supernaturalism, and the men of science, who are sceptics all round, the strange thing is that anyone should arise to express a belief which is so contrary to the spirit of our time, though we have by analysis and investigation laid our hands on many things hitherto sealed'—to wit, gas, electricity, the telephone, and so forth.

Be all this as it may, we tell the tale as it was told to us, and hope the hound of Essilmont, if it bayed at all, did so for the last time.

At Chilcote the first day of death stole quietly on. Prostrate with grief, Alison remained in her own room, leaving all that was to be done with the vicar, the doctor, and Archie, who, plunged in sorrow great as any could feel who shared not the blood of the dead man, hovered about her in a helpless kind of way, as if he would have

striven to console—yea, almost to caress her. Was she not the child he had carried often in his arms? but, as he phrased it, ‘he wistna what to do.’

And as the girl sat in her room, careless of who came to the house or left it, with the one awful conviction upon her that *he* had passed away ‘to that unutterable mystery and greeting which mortal eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.’ Her beautiful face grew all lined and haggard, and her dark-rimmed eyes, in their peculiar glitter, told of many a sleepless night and of much mental anguish.

Lord Cadbury, as we have elsewhere said, hated sick-rooms, ‘and all that sort of thing;’ still more did he hate death-beds, funerals, and all connected therewith. And when last at Chilcote, seeing that the end was not far off—indeed, the doctors had said so—he went back to town to await the final catastrophe, ‘the double event,’ that would rid him of a querulous friend, and

place that friend's daughter more completely at his mercy—yea, and the mercy of Fate!

In reply to the posted announcements of the death, his card came to Alison in a black-edged envelope, sealed with his coronet in black wax. He did not attempt—even with all his pretences and past protestations—to indite a sham letter of condolence, nor did she miss it.

‘Dead—dead at last!’ muttered Cadbury, as he sat in the sunny bow-window of the club looking out on busy Pall Mall, his ferret-like eyes glittering cunningly and leeringly as he tugged his white, horseshoe-shaped moustachios. ‘Well, he’s a loss to no one but the girl herself—not even to his creditors now—the vain old Scotch pump, with his pedigree and his ancestry, his heraldry and his beggarly bosh! But I would like to know *who* the devil sent that mysterious thousand pounds! It may be a trump-card for me yet.’

Cadbury began to consider his plans anew. He would get Alison up to London and give her a letter of introduction—as companion or something of that kind—to a now somewhat *passé* ‘lady friend’ of his, who occupied a tiny villa at St. John’s Wood, and drove a brougham, of course, who would ‘soon contrive to make it all straight for him;’ and he chuckled as he thought of the success that, through her, would eventually be his. Anyway, the proud Alison would find some difficulty in ‘crested up’ her haughty little head after her residence at St. John’s Wood.

Lord Cadbury could not come to the quiet and hasty funeral at Chilcote; he was ‘too indisposed.’ Certainly Alison did not want him. She had had quite enough of the peer, and hoped never to see his face again.

‘Better awa’, Miss Alison, better awa’; his absence is guid companie,’ said Archie, who could not endure Cadbury, and loathed

his dandified groom Gaskins. ‘‘Od, missie, he’s worth nae weal that canna bide wae. May he dee like a trooper’s horse, wi’ his shoon on!’ added Archie, through his set teeth.

So as a hateful dream the details of death passed on. ‘Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.’ The vicar’s voice fell clearly in the calm spring air on the ear of Alison as she leant on the doctor’s arm, for very few were present at the funeral, and these few, save Archie, were strangers; but her soul seemed to shrink within her as she heard the shovel-fuls of gravel pattering down on the polished coffin-lid and the large metal plate, which bore the name and age of

‘SIR RANALD CHEYNE, BART., OF THAT ILK
AND ESSILMONT.’

The last of her race, save *herself*!

‘Surely, surely, if he is in England, Bevil will come to me now when he hears of this calamity!’ she whispered in her heart, as she sat in the solitude of her own room when all was over.

But Bevil Goring came not. He had never had explained to him the *cause* of her abrupt and mysterious flight or departure from Chilcote, and the subsequent trip in Cadbury's yacht, and why, or how, she had neither time nor opportunity to write to him the briefest note of farewell or enlightenment on the subject; but all that had nothing to do with his absence on the present occasion, as we shall relate anon.

But she was brooding sadly over it, while—declining the proffered hospitality of the vicarage—she sat in her loneliness, watching the stars as they came out one by one, thinking of the bitterness and brevity of human life, and marvelling how many millions of the human race these orbs had looked down upon, and would yet look down upon, in the ages to come.

Her father's spendthrift errors in youth, and his petulance and selfishness in old age, were all forgotten by Alison now. She remembered only his love for herself, and

even repented that she could not gratify him by sacrificing herself to Cadbury.

Would she have prolonged his life by doing so? That was a problem on which she could not—dared not dwell.

His tenants—or rather those who had been his tenants—far away among the Braes of Aberdeenshire, longer than they might have been, but for the merciful consideration of his creditors—men who, even in this advanced age, deemed themselves born vassals of the house of Cheyne, as their fathers did when the Red Harlaw was fought, or the Brig o' Dee was bravely manned in the days of Montrose—were stirred with much genuine grief when they heard of his death. For, though proud to his equals, he had ever been a friendly and kindly landlord to them, and thinking of them ever, in the good spirit of the olden time, as 'my father's people,' he would shake warmly the hand of old Donald Gordon, the gudeman of a little farm-town,

while asking after his wife and daughters by name ; though he would barely nod his aristocratic head to some 'earth-hungry' commercial man, who had acquired a fine estate—all won by honest industry.

'Oh, why does not Bèvil come to me ; if in England, he must have heard of papa's death?' was her ever recurring thought.

And he did hear it ; but, by a strange contingency, a little too late. Meanwhile, not much time was given Alison to linger in desolate Chilcote, and she found that, a day or two after the funeral, she would have to face the cold and bitter world—yea, and to face it alone, tender, young, and inexperienced as she was !

Sir Ranald's death brought the last of his creditors swooping down upon the dregs and lees of his possessions, and, with a heart that seemed broken afresh, Alison surrendered to them everything, even to that heirloom which her father deemed the palladium of the Cheynes—the great silver

tankard that had been the gift of Elizabeth, Queen Dowager of Scotland, to Sir Ranald Cheyne of Essilmont and Inverugie, the master of her household. And she wept with the knowledge that to have parted with that would well-nigh have broken her father's heart.

The mysterious thousand pounds were spent—all save a little sum; but the last of her father's smaller debts had been paid, and his last days soothed by many a comfort. So Alison preferred to leave Chilcote—for ever, and Archie pressed her sorely to accept, in whole or in part, his carefully treasured 'three hunner pounds,' but pressed her in vain.

Memories of the Beguinage and of sweet Sister Lisette came over her now; but no—no—even if they would take her there for what her hands might do, it would seem like a relinquishment of Bevil Goring and life too.

'I am sure, Archie, I could teach little

children—give lessons in music or something in London,’ said she.

‘And I’ll gang to London too, missie.’

‘For what purpose?’

‘Odd’s sake, missie, to tak’ care o’ ye.’

‘Poor, dear Archie!’ said the girl, softly, with a sob in her slender white throat.

Accompanied by this retainer, she paid a farewell visit to the churchyard of Chilcote Vicarage, where, amid the bright sunshine of spring, the earth seemed at its fairest, and the quaint, old, picturesque fane of the Norman days, moss-green, ivy-grown, and tree-shaded, was casting its shadows across ‘God’s Acre.’

She laid a chaplet of flowers, woven by her own loving hands and watered by her tears, on her father’s grave—that spot which to her no sunshine could brighten—the spot where he lay, without a stone as yet, the last of an old, old warlike and historic race; and then she prayed for the dead—a prayer, it is said, never offered up

in vain ; for though the petition may be refused, still the petitioner may be rewarded in some fashion for the generous and unselfish prompting, and we are told it is good to pray for them, that they may be loosed from their sins. So Alison prayed by her father's grave, while her faithful follower, who stood thereby hat in hand, had his mind full of prayerful thoughts that could take no form of utterance, for Archie was a true-blue Presbyterian, and knew not how to pray for those who could no longer do so for themselves ; and then the pair crossed the churchyard stile in silence and passed away.

Old, wrinkled, sour-visaged Archie Auchindoir, with keen grey eyes, white hair, and saturnine cast of features, was a strange 'Squire o' the Dames,' or *Escudero* (as the Spaniards would have it), for a handsome young girl, albeit that she was in the deepest mourning ; but no one could be more kind, loving, and reverential, for poor

Archie loved the very ground his young mistress trod, and watched over her as a father would have done.

And so, with this peculiar attendant, Alison bade adieu to old Rebecca Prune, quitted Chilcote, and, furnished with a letter of introduction from the vicar, set out by second class for London by an early train on her melancholy pilgrimage; and many a poor girl has thus set forth to earn her bread without the honest consolation and support of a vassal so tender and true.

Piqued as she was now beginning to be by the knowledge that Bevil Goring was in London, when he might have been seeking her, especially amid her sorrow, in the country, she was not without hopes—but oh, how slender they were!—of perhaps hearing something of him in that vast human wilderness towards which she was being hurried.

CHAPTER XIII.

EVENTS PROGRESS.

THE whole expedition was now returning from the Gold Coast, save those who had found their graves in the wilderness on the advance to Coomassie, and in the fighting incident thereto. Among those returning were the two hundred and sixty-eight wounded officers and men. The number of deaths in proportion was small as compared with those in recent European conflicts—a fact explainable by the arms and ammunition used by the Ashantees; first, their old-fashioned firelocks and use—not of bullets, but slugs, projectiles which soon lost their velocity after discharge, and were easily stopped after penetrating the body, the

stronger bones of which they were incapable of breaking; and lastly, by the total absence of artillery.

The telegraphic wire made people at home aware that many of the Rifle Brigade had died on the voyage homeward between the Gold Coast and Madeira; that the Welsh Fusiliers had only twenty men on their sick-list; and the hardy Highlanders very few, though they had to regret the death by wounds of their major, William Baird, who had served with them for twenty years, and been at the siege and fall of Sebastopol.

It was known in England that many of the sick and wounded were to remain in the hospital ships, *Victor Emmanuel* and *Simoom*, or were landed at Ascension and the Cape de Verde Isles for medical treatment; but, as no officer of the Rifles was recorded as among these, Laura with her daughter, escorted by Goring, had betaken herself to the port which is the great head-

quarters of the British navy, to behold the arrival of the victorious troops from Ashantee, and for whom a great ovation was prepared.

People from London and elsewhere crowded in thousands to witness their landing. In the hotel where Laura and Bevil Goring were, there were more than one old Scottish veteran officer of the Crimea, and even of the Peninsular war, who had come from the land beyond the Tweed to see, as they said, 'their dear old Black Watch again;' and more than one lady in widow's weeds, some young, some elderly, with their little brood, come to look again upon the ranks of the Welsh Fusiliers and the Rifles, though there a beloved face would be seen no more.

How gladly would poor Bella Chevenix have gone too; but she had no valid excuse—no friend or chaperon going save Laura, of whose movements she was ignorant; so she had but to wait, in the secluded village,

the tidings given by the newspapers, but with more impatience and certainly less equanimity than Lady Julia at splendid Wilmothurst.

Greater was her love for Jerry than the latter could actually realise; for, with all her past coquetry, Bella was one of those ardent and impulsive girls that a man only comes across once in a lifetime, or, it may-be, thinks so. She knew that Jerry was comparatively safe when the fleet sailed, but she had heard with dismay of deaths among the Rifles ere it reached Madeira; so it may be imagined how eagerly and anxiously she watched the public prints, and learned that on the 19th of March the English people had the joy of welcoming home, first the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers, as they landed from the *Tamar* at Portsmouth, where, among many other graceful gifts, a regimental goat was presented to them in lieu of their famous Indian one, which had died on the coast of Africa; and anon of

the more brilliant ovation which was reserved for the heroic Black Watch when the soldiers of the latter came in the *Sarmatian*, and, prior to landing, had gleefully discarded their grey tunics and white helmets to resume their national uniform, the kilt and bonnet, so known to martial glory. And then came the Rifle Brigade and the Royal Engineers on board the mighty *Himalaya*.

How Laura's heart beat while she clung to Goring's arm and clasped little Netty's tiny hand, when the signals announced that the ship was about to enter that great harbour which is the most spacious and secure in the British Isles, though less than a quarter of a mile in breadth at the narrowest part of the entrance.

'There she is,' exclaimed Goring, 'just rounding South Sea Castle!'

Laura's bright hazel eyes grew dim as she watched the approaching ship. It seemed to her as if it was but yesterday, in one

sense, since she had seen the transport depart with the Rifles after her reconciliation and reunion with Dalton ; and yet, so strong are the impressions of the human mind, that it also seemed as if it were ages ago ; and now—now he was coming home, though but perhaps the wreck of himself, to her and their little Netty—the husband and the father from whom they had been so long and unnaturally separated !

‘By Jove, she has her ensign half hoisted !’ exclaimed a voice among the thousands of whom she formed a unit.

Goring had remarked this through his double field-glass, yet said nothing of it to his fair companion, lest she might be unnecessarily alarmed.

‘What does it mean ?’ she asked him more than once, ere he replied, unwillingly,

‘It means that there has been a death on board.’

‘A death !’ she said faintly, as she recalled the loving tenor of Dalton’s last fare-

well letter to her, written like Jerry's to Bella on the night before Coomassie was entered, and of the fatal telegram that told of his serious wounds. 'A death, Goring?' she repeated, with a wild expression in her beautiful eyes, while her cheek grew snowy white as she watched the slowly approaching ship, which was under half steam now.

'Yes, marm,' said an officious old sailor, who was regarding the stately vessel through an old, battered telescope tied round with spunyarn; 'some poor fellow has lost the number of his mess, for there is a coffin covered by a Union Jack in one of the quarter boats, as you may see for yourself, marm.'

He proffered his telescope civilly enough, but Laura shrank closer to the side of Goring, who remained silent, for he too had his own thoughts. She could not look; her eyes felt sightless, and her poor heart seemed to die within her with the most fearful forebodings.

The bands of several regiments stationed

at Portsmouth were now filling the sunny air with music, and the cheers of the Riflemen, clustering like bees along the sides of the mighty ship, were responding to the united voices of thousands on the shore, giving those hearty and joyous shouts that come from British throats and British lungs alone; and Laura, under all the pressure of the occasion and her own terrible thoughts, was on the point of fainting, as the transport came slowly abreast of the sea-wall, when Goring threw an arm round her, and exclaimed,

‘Thank God, there is Dalton—there is dear old Tony at last!’

‘Where—oh, where?’ asked Laura, in a breathless voice.

‘At the back of the poop,’ he replied, lifting Netty aloft on his shoulder, as they now saw an officer—Dalton, indeed—with a face white as his tropical helmet, with the pallor that comes of suffering and much loss of blood—waving his handkerchief to them in

recognition, for the ship was very close in-shore, and Laura was soon to learn that the melancholy freight in the quarter-boat was the body of a poor sergeant who died off the Lizard, and whose widow—believing herself yet a wife—was awaiting him on the pier with a babe at her breast—the babe his eyes would never look upon.

In a few minutes more the steam was blowing off, and Goring with those in his care joined the stream of the privileged few, who poured along the gangways on board.

‘God is very merciful,’ murmured Laura, as she laid her face on Dalton’s breast, heedless of spectators. ‘He has given you back to me——’

‘From the very gates of death, dearest Laura.’

‘Oh, what should I have done if you had perished, my darling?—oh, my darling,’ she said; in a low voice of exquisite tenderness as he embraced Netty—Antoinette so named after himself, and grown up to girlhood without his knowledge of her existence.

‘Bravo,’ cried a hearty voice familiar to them all; ‘as Albert Smith used to say, “*C’est l’amour, l’amour, l’amour, qui fait le monde go round, O.*” Thank God I see you and Old England again, Laura,’ and Jerry Wilmot kissed her with hearty goodwill.

Like Dalton, Jerry was very pale and wan; but not so feeble as the former—and from the effects of his wounds and fever could scarcely stand, even yet.

The ovation that followed the landing of the Rifles may be fresh in the recollection of many. Balls, banquets, and addresses were amply accorded to all the returned troops, and decorations and crosses for valour were fully bestowed; but of all the joyous entertainments Bevil Goring saw nothing, as a notice which he read by chance in a paper led him to leave Portsmouth on the evening of the very day the regiment landed.

It was simply a paragraph in a Southampton paper, on which his eye fell casually, that rooted him for a few minutes to the spot, and ran thus :

‘We understand that the late Sir Ranald Cheyne, Bart., of Essilmont and that ilk, whose demise at Chilcote we recorded some days ago, has died without heirs male, and his baronetcy, one of the oldest in Scotland, has thus become extinct.’

‘Who died some days ago at Chilcote,’ thought Goring, who felt a species of shock; ‘and Alison is thus alone—alone in the world—poor girl! At Cadbury’s mercy perhaps—while I—oh, what must she think of me? Why do I only hear of this calamity now?’

So next noon betimes saw him arrive at Chilcote with his horse at a rasping gallop, and his heart beating high with mingled hope, love, and great commiseration, as he knew how Alison idolised the querulous old man she had lost; and again, as before, his spirit sank on finding only silence and desolation—the house abandoned and all its windows shuttered.

‘Desolation, as before,’ he muttered, as he leaped from his horse; ‘desolation, and

perhaps mystery too. Where can she have gone, and with whom?’

He passed the gate, and mechanically handled the door-knocker, and the sound thereof echoed hollowly through the silent house. He drew close to the shuttered windows, and peeped in through a fissure in one. He saw the almost entirely darkened dining-room, from the walls of which the portraits of the two cavalier brothers were still looking grimly and stonily down; on the table was a vase, with a few flowers still in it; and near stood a chair and a work-basket, in which some coloured wools were lying.

Very recently must Alison have been there, as the flowers seemed still somewhat fresh; in fact, she had only set out on her pilgrimage the day before, when he had been at Portsmouth.

How full the place seemed of her presence! Yet he had to turn sadly away.

The buds in the giant beeches were

bursting already into tender green leaves; the birds were twittering and singing in the hedgerows, and the kine lowed amid the deep spring grass of yonder meadows; 'the deep bell' swung in the distant tower of Chilcote Church; the dogs barked sharply in an adjacent farm-yard; and close and nigh was the hum of the bee, as it thrust its golden head into the cups of the spring flowers in the now neglected garden.

To his senses all seemed unchanged as when he last saw Alison there; and where was she now—his love—his promised wife?

Where again was she gone? Into the hard and chilly world—all the colder and more perilous now that her father was dead, and that she must stand alone in it?

Alone!

Bevil Goring felt his heart wrung by irrepressible anxiety, and he bethought him at once of appealing to the vicar of the parish, who could not fail to possess some information on the subject.

The latter received him with considerable suavity, for he was a kind-hearted old gentleman, but eyed him keenly under his bushy white eyebrows. He had heard—but how, he knew not, for gossip spreads fast in a secluded country parish; yet he *had* heard that there was a young officer from the camp, who was wont to hover near Chilcote Beeches, and who was eminently distasteful to the late Sir Ranald, for reasons best known to the latter; so the worthy vicar fashioned his answers accordingly.

Bevil, however, learned that Alison had been resident for many weeks at Chilcote after her return from the Continent, and prior to the demise of her father.

Many weeks! thought he, and yet she had never written, as she might have done, to his address at the camp, whence letters were forwarded to his address in London. Poor Alison had not written because she knew he was absent, and, moreover, she was sorely pre-occupied at home.

Was she under the influence of Cadbury? thought Bevil. Oh, that was impossible! Yet Goring began to feel, as Alison often felt, that their engagement—that its many tram-mels—was a very peculiar one, and would be so while her father lived. Now he was gone, and wealth had accrued to Goring, yet they were as much apart as ever!

‘Sir Ranald was dead, yes,’ he heard the vicar saying, ‘and buried near the ancient yew in the churchyard, where Miss Cheyne meant in time to erect a marble cross.’

‘That shall be my duty,’ observed Goring.

‘Yours?’ said the vicar, inquiringly, and again the bushy brows were knitted. ‘Poor man! he is sleeping where I know he did not want to lie, in my churchyard; yet he will sleep as soundly there in English earth, let us hope, as if he lay among his ancestors in Ellon Kirk, among mailed knights, mediæval bones, and the *Hic jacets* of other days,’ he added, smiling.

‘Where has Miss Cheyne gone to?’

‘London,’ replied the vicar, curtly.

‘Can you give me her address?’ asked Goring, eagerly.

‘May I ask who inquires?’ said the vicar.

‘I sent in my card—Captain Goring, of the Rifle Brigade.’

‘Just returned from Ashantee?’

‘Nay,’ replied Bevil, colouring with honest mortification, ‘I was detailed for home service.’

‘And now stationed at Aldershot?’

‘Yes.’

‘Ah! a bad place Aldershot—a very centre of dissipation, I fear. May I ask if you are a relation?’

‘I am not.’

‘A friend?’ queried the vicar.

‘Of course—one most deeply interested in Miss Cheyne.’

‘I thought so,’ rejoined the vicar, eyeing him keenly and with a curiously provoking smile while playing with his gold eyeglass; ‘may I ask how and why?’

‘Certainly—I am engaged to her.’

‘Her *fiancé*?’ asked the vicar; ‘is that what you mean?’

‘Yes; and now *where* is she?’

‘I regret—regret to say—that—that I have not yet her present address. She only left this for London yesterday.’

‘In other words, by your tone,’ said Goring, haughtily, as he rose and took his hat, ‘you know it, but decline to give it to me?’

‘I do not say so,’ replied the vicar, also rising, as if the interview was ended; ‘but for the present you will excuse me saying more.’

‘Sir!’ exclaimed Bevil, with some heat.

‘Goring—Goring,’ muttered the vicar, eyeing Bevil’s card; ‘it is strange that the young lady never spoke to me of you, though in her grief she several times mentioned another friend.’

‘Ah!—who?’

‘Lord Cadbury.’

‘Cadbury!’ exclaimed Goring, with a contemptuous inflection of voice that did not escape the listener.

‘Yes; who, by a very ample remittance—a thousand pounds, I believe—did much to ease and soothe her poor father’s last days on earth.’

‘Indeed!’

Whew! here was intelligence. His birthday gift had been attributed to, and evidently adopted by, that reptile Cadbury! And, finding that there was nothing to be made of the suspicious and over-wary vicar, he withdrew.

Scarcely had Goring, disappointed and dispirited, taken his departure, when Lord Cadbury, accompanied by Gaskins, having found Chilcote deserted, arrived at the vicarage to make the same inquiries, but with very different intentions. Impressed by the years and rank of his second visitor, the vicar admitted that he was cognisant of Miss Cheyne’s movements, and, on consider-

ation, promised to send her correct address to Cadbury Court when she wrote to him from London ; for, knowing the helplessness of the young girl, even with Cadbury was the vicar wary.

Dalton remained at Chilcote Grange to be nursed by Laura ; Jerry departed on sick leave to Wilmothurst, while Bevil Goring remained with the battalion at Aldershot to undergo the drudgery of the spring drills in the Long Valley, and await in a kind of silent desperation with hope to hear something of Alison.

How terrible to endure was this period of an inaction that was enforced by circumstances over which he had no control, and many a hearty malediction he bestowed upon the close old vicar of Chilcote.

Often he opened the clasp of her ring—Ellon's ring—and gazed upon her tiny lock of hair, now faded and withered by the heat it had undergone when 'up country' in the Land of the Sun, and on her pictured

face he gazed till his eyes ached and burned with the intensity of his longing to see the features smile, the lips unclose, in fancy.

We are told that if a man, 'overborne by any grief or pain—not the more endurable because no outward sign can be discerned—should go forth into a crowd to seek for solace, the chances are that he will return in a more discontented frame of mind than that in which he set out, simply from realising the fact how infinitely little his own sufferings affect the most of the world at its work or play.'

Amid the bustle, gaiety, and business of the crowded camp at Aldershot, Bevil Goring realised all this to the fullest extent.

Day after day went by and brought no news of Alison, either to Goring or to Laura Dalton, whom he saw frequently, and hope deferred was making the heart of the young officer very 'sick' indeed; but, though he wrote a very important letter to his solicitors at Gray's Inn Square concerning certain

properties at Chilcote, he went there no more.

In the words of L. E. L., he could no more

‘To the loved haunt return,
Love’s happy home; and touch the tender chord,
And softly whisper there the little word,
The name whereat fond memories shall burn,
That parting vows record.’

CHAPTER XIV.

BELLA'S DOT.

LADY JULIA WILMOT had been in hope that when the Ashantee 'affair' was over, Jerry would settle down, 'marry money,' free his ancestral seat from encumbrance, and take a proper pride in it; but for a time after the capture of Coomassie it had seemed that she was to be afflicted by a double calamity—that the estate was lost, and Jerry might never return.

It was not in her aristocratic nature to be very much moved about anything. Excitement or enthusiasm of any kind was 'bad form,' she deemed. Thus, if she was not plunged in profound grief when she heard of the poor fellow's supposed death, neither

was she greatly excited with joy when she heard that he was safe and coming home again. To this noble daughter of twenty earls, an only son more or less in the world really seemed of no great consequence, unless it were, if he 'married money,' to serve her own ends.

When tidings of Jerry's death came, she had attired herself most becomingly in fashionable mourning of the requisite depth of wear, as understood by the drapers in Regent Street. Round her white throat were narrow tuckers of yellowish-white lace, and a rustling train, spread over a crinoline, floated behind her. Now that he was safe, her mourning was relinquished, almost with a sigh, we fear, it *was* so becoming; and Floss's mother-of-pearl basket, which had been duly lined with black silk, was now refitted with blue satin.

She received Jerry in her usual stately fashion; gave him her cool, slim hand to press, which he did heartily, while his eyes

moistened ; and accorded her smooth and unlined cheek for his salute, and then his welcome ended. So ere long Jerry began to think, as Mrs. Gaskell's novel has it, that John Thornton's mamma might be wrong when she says, 'Mothers' love is given by God, John. It holds fast for ever and for ever. A girl's love is like a puff of smoke, it changes with every wind.' But then there was nothing aristocratic about stalwart John Thornton's mother.

Mr. Chevenix had always loved Jerry for his father's sake, and for the sake of the 'Wilmots of Wilmothurst,' who had been of Wilmothurst, 'and that ilk,' as the Scots would say, for time out of mind ; but there his regard ended ; he had small care for Lady Julia, and, when tidings came of Jerry's death, after a moderate time had elapsed he resolved to take the mortgages in hand and assert his rights—in short, to make the property, what it now almost virtually was, his own, and to request

Lady Julia to leave the place, to crush her false and insensate pride in a heart that seemed without any other human sentiment.

‘He has formally announced the foreclosure of the mortgages, this man Chevenix, Emily,’ said Lady Julia, with some consternation—at least for her—as she opened her letters one morning. ‘The crash has come at last!’

‘What does that mean, aunt?’ asked the young lady.

‘My lawyer tells me it means the act of foreclosing—cutting off the equity of redemption, and that the money would not be taken in payment, even were poor Jerry alive and had it to pay.’

And Mr. Chevenix had chuckled as he gave these instructions, for he had endured enough of Lady Julia’s aristocratic caprice, and knew how she had often treated his Bella, a girl certainly second to none, ‘as if she were the dirt of the earth,’ as he said, bitterly.

But Bella had deplored these sharp measures, for she felt that a strange but tender and undefinable tie bound her to Jerry Wilmot, dead or alive.

As children she and Jerry had been permitted to be playmates, and she had been somewhat of a pet with his father, the old Squire; but it was not until they had grown up, till he had been at college and then joined the Rifles, that Lady Julia felt that the intimacy was—well, unfortunate, and to be finally snubbed.

The shock given to the sensitive Bella by the perils encountered by Jerry—first the report of his death, and subsequently the account of the precarious condition in which he had embarked at Cape Coast, caused her many terrible nights and days, and nearly threw the poor girl into a fever, as she had none in whom to confide her sorrow, or her secret love; but sorrow rarely kills, and though at first fretful and resentful, with the memory of Lady Julia's want of proper

affection, she was very gentle, quiet, and patient, and besought her father not to foreclose the mortgages yet a while; but he, out of all patience with non-payment of interest on one hand, Lady Julia's hauteur and insolence on the other, with the great doubt entertained of Jerry ever coming home to keep the fragment of Wilmothurst that yet accrued to him, had put the matter in the hands of his legal agents, who, curiously enough, were Messrs. Taype, Shawrpe, and Scrawly, of Gray's Inn; and things were at a serious crisis when Jerry returned home to find a deadlier enmity than ever in his mother's heart at 'that creature Chevenix and the forward minx his daughter.'

The latter knew of Jerry's arrival; her heart had beat responsive to the clangour of the village bells, the music of the volunteer band which preceded the carriage in which he came, and the cheers of the warm-hearted rustics, who unharnessed the

horses and drew it along ; and ere long she heard with pity and anxiety from Mademoiselle Florine, whom she chanced to meet, that he was confined to his room—even to his bed—by a return of the treacherous jungle-fever, which is apt to recur at times unexpectedly for months after recovery is thought certain ; and while in this condition, helpless and incapable of action, he was galled and tormented, and his jealousy was roused by his mother and cousin Emily with the real information of how the matter of the mortgages stood ; that Lord Twesildown had heard of them, and with an eye to possessing Wilmothurst and Langley Park intended to degrade himself by proposing for Bella Chevenix, now that she would be a Hampshire heiress, as his mother, Lady Ashcombe, had the very bad taste to inform them.

And Jerry writhed in his bed when he heard of these things, and times there were when he wished that after all he had found

his grave, like many more, on the wooded banks of the Prah.

Twesildown had an estate, though a rather encumbered one; but he had also a title and undeniable good looks: Jerry was now well-nigh a landless man. Bella had suspected, he feared, the purity and disinterestedness of his love, and thus circumstances, he thought, were all against her viewing him with favour.

If the worst came to the worst, and he were sold up, he would effect an exchange for India, and think of her no more.

No more—how hard it was!

Just then, in his soreness of heart, Jerry was not sorry that a legitimate fit of illness detained him in the house at Wilmothurst, and separate from Bella; for he was hourly stung by tidings—exaggerated in some instances—that Lord Twesildown was daily giving her drives with his mother, and mounts of his best horses; and, as he was known to be rather impecunious, and quite

au fait of the fact that Bella Chevenix was her father's heiress, Jerry felt jealous, mortified, and bitter. He even sorely regretted the 'gushing' farewell letter he had written to her before entering Coomassie; and could little conceive that even now, in a silken case, she wore that letter in her bosom!

It was quite evident how hotly jealous he was of Twesildown, and this sentiment Cousin Emily left nothing undone or unsaid to fan.

'How you chatter, cousin,' said he, impatiently.

'I am like the brook, you think, on this subject,' said Emily, with one of her sweetest smiles.

'What brook?'

'I go on for ever.'

'By Jove, you do—and with a will, too!' said Jerry, who was now stretched at full length in a hammock netting between two trees on the lawn, lazily enjoying one of the

last box of cigars he might open in Wilmot-hurst, as his family were contemplating a removal therefrom, and for where was quite undecided.

Mr. Chevenix had courteously left his card for Jerry, so Bella knew that, come what might, the latter in common civility would call ere long ; and to that event she was looking forward now ; but days passed, and Jerry came not.

And so while Bella, remembering the tenor of her last farewell meeting with Jerry, and that of the treasured letter, which amounted to a declaration, was eating her heart out with disappointment that he made no effort to see her, he was daily being 'primed up' by Cousin Emily with jealousy of Twesildown ; and *this* was the time to which he and she had both looked forward so eagerly !

The bitterness of this situation was enhanced to Jerry by the knowledge that his ancient inheritance of Wilmothurst was

Bella's *dot*, and known to be such by Twesildown, to whom it was a lure quite as much as her undoubted brilliance and beauty.

‘There is the devil to pay and pitch-hot here about the mortgages,’ he wrote to Bevil Goring; ‘and moreover, old fellow, I am sorely disappointed in my love affair. I have read that what “drives one man to drink drives another to the *demi-monde*.” Whether of the two is worse, the immortal gods can tell. Either remedy is worse than the disease, I fancy! But anyway a few months more will see me again broiling up country, and going in for iced drinks and Chinsurah cheroots.’

CHAPTER XV.

IN BAYSWATER.

‘**T**WENTY years old to-day—twenty years!’ murmured Alison, as she glanced at herself in the little mirror, and thought how pale and how much older than her age she looked in her plain black mourning dress, which was destitute of other ornament than smooth white cuffs and a ruche or frill of lace, or some such soft material, round her slender throat.

Vividly came back to the girl’s memory her other birthdays, ere poverty fell upon her father, and ere she was—as now—alone in the world, and when each recurring anniversary found her loaded with caresses, congratulations, and pretty presents. And

she could recall her fourth birthday at Essilmont, when she was a little child in a white embroidered frock, with a broad sash matching the colour of her dark blue eyes, with her brothers, Ranald and Ellon, eating strawberries off a huge salver held for them by Archie Auchindoir, who seemed an old Archie even then.

Never more would the kisses or caresses of father or mother touch her brow or cheek; and now she was in the ranks of those who have to earn their daily bread as a governess on thirty pounds per annum, teach French, English, and music to two little girls of the ages of nine and ten respectively.

And sadly on this day she thought of all that had befallen her, and how completely Bevil Goring had passed out of her life, apparently for ever! Wearily too her eye went round the bare school-room in that stately house in Pembridge Square, Bayswater—a long, low-ceiled apartment, with

two windows that overlooked Westbourne Grove, a grove only in name now.

The vicar of Chilcote procured her this situation, and, beyond her name and his recommendation, her employer, Mrs. S. De Jobbyns, knew nothing of Alison Cheyne and cared not to inquire. The vicar had written lately to state that a handsome marble cross—a Celtic one he believed it was called—had lately been placed by a friend above her father's grave, and Alison's heart swelled with gratitude as she read of it.

It must have been done by Lord Cadbury, she thought. Who else could have done so?

She had now been two months in Pembroke Square—two whole months—and despite the unwonted drudgery of teaching, and the dreariness of routine—despite slights, almost insults, that were offered, perhaps unconsciously, by the cold-hearted and the underbred, the time had slipped quickly away.

Thus condemned to the dull drudgery of

daily teaching a couple of troublesome, peevish, and ill-tempered brats in that bare and comfortless school-room, was Alison, a loving and passionate girl, made more passionate, loving, and tender by the sore griefs she had known, but all unsoured by these and the doubtful prospect—yea, the utter blank of her future.

Though the change of condition was not much to Alison, the change of *position* and that vacuity of the future were frightful to the poor girl; and in taking the situation for the sake of her father's name and his old family pride, though he was now in his grave, she had besought the vicar of Chilcote, in recommending her to Mrs. S. De Jobbys, to conceal what she had ever been—nay, was still—the daughter of a baronet of Nova Scotia, whose diploma dated from 1625.

The family of Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbys consisted of three daughters, the eldest Miss Victoria, of whom more anon, was in

her nineteenth year, and Alison's two pupils, Irene and Iseulte. Like the rest of the snobocracy of the metropolis she believed in double names, thus she figured in the royal Blue-Book as Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbyns, a style of address which would have astonished her late husband, worthy old David or D. Jobbyns, as he called himself, when for many a year he was acquiring wealth as an industrious soap-boiler in Bow East, and when he married pretty little Sally Slumpkins, the barmaid at the 'Black Swan' in Mile-End Road, and when she little foresaw how wealthy a 'relict' she would be left.

Pretty Sally, who had, of course, preferred the worthy soap-boiler to his rival the potman, had now, amid ease and much good living, expanded into a stout, blousy, and coarsely-featured matron, greatly puffed up by wealth, success, pride, and vanity.

She always wore the richest materials and

the most massive jewellery, and never omitted to figure in her open carriage in the Row, when weather permitted, and strove hard in everything to ape all the manners of the 'upper ten,' in which she was fully seconded by her eldest born, Miss Victoria S. De Jobbyns, a rather pretty, but very insipid girl, who wore her hair frizzed into her eyes, and had a nose more than retroussé, for though she was pretty, as we have said, her features were nevertheless of the genuine Cockney type.

Alison took all her meals in the school-room with the children, and at the early hours which were directed for them. She was never in the drawing-room—'the British drawing-room,' that sanctum sacred to Mrs. De Jobbyns and her 'swell' visitors, as she called them, and when she thought it was 'rather the thing' to have afternoon tea in dragon blue and white crockery on a beautiful Chippendale table.

And so, for thirty pounds per annum,

Alison underwent this life of mortification.

‘Thirty pound a-year, and her laundry work, my dear,’ as Mrs. De Jobbys informed her friend, Mrs. Popkins-Robbynson.

‘That is very cheap for one evidently so accomplished,’ said the latter.

‘Very cheap, indeed; but she is such a good style for the children, you know; and really I think she must have been some one of—of—well, means once.’

‘Why?’

‘The richly laced under-garments she sends to the laundry would quite surprise you, my dear.’

‘But won’t her Scotch haccent spile the young ’uns?’ observed Mr. Popkins-Robbynson.

‘Not at all; and she seems to get on so nicely with the servants. They all adore her.’

‘Indeed!’

‘My last governess, Miss Smythe—Smythe was always at war with them.’

‘How?’

‘They never paid her sufficient deference. Oh, what a nuisance that woman was ; yet we paid her forty pounds a year—actually what we pays the cook, my dear.’

To be near his young mistress, to watch over her, as he thought, and to be able to see her from time to time, old Archie had located himself in a humble lodging in Moscow Road, not far from the square, where he lived with the strictest frugality, fearing that a time might come when his ‘three hunner pounds,’ or what remained of them, might be of service to *her*, ‘as hained gear helps weel,’ and often, with more patience than even a lover might have had, he promenaded the square for hours, watching for a sight of her at the school-room windows, or till she came forth with her pupils to walk in Kensington Gardens—watching for her till he in turn was watched, as one bent on something nefarious, by the policeman at the corner.

And ere long the two little girls began

to wonder who the funny old man was that so often hovered near them in their walks, who treated their governess with such profound deference and devotion, and was never unprovided with chocolate creams and so forth for them—‘sweeties for the bairns,’ as he called them.

But often Alison sat up in her little white bed, in her bare and rather comfortless room, in the darkness of the silent night, and, looking at the stars, would ask why she was so lonely in the world now—she who was born with the prospect of a very different state of existence! Then would come all her dream-memories of the past, with those other dreams of what *might be*, did fortune prove more kind. How long it seemed ago since she had her father to nurse and Cadbury to shun—longer still since she had known the joy of Bevil’s love, and the stolen meetings under the solemn and whispering beeches of Chilcote.

Chilcote was lonely; but how lovely it

seemed to her in memory now! She even found herself at times now indulging in the two conundrums—the modern pessimist's speculations—Is civilisation a failure, and is life worth living?

The monotony of the school-room was now occasionally broken by visits—few and far between, certainly—of the eldest daughter of the house, Miss De Jobbyns, who had returned from a sojourn with some friends at Hastings—a young lady rather loud in tone and fast in manner. She had early discovered that Alison was dexterous in the way of embroidering, and thus kept her little hands busy, when not otherwise occupied, in tracing out her monogram and crest—for she had that, of course—in the corners of handkerchiefs, interspersed with forget-me-nots, rose-sprays, and fern-leaves.

Miss Victoria De Jobbyns (she had originally been christened Sarah, but that name was dropped now as vulgar) had from the

first felt an emotion of pique that her little sisters' governess should be so lady-like, so perfectly patrician in air and bearing, and, more than all, so uselessly handsome; for, of course, she thought, of what use is beauty to a governess?

Her mother's first idea had been, what a perilous inmate in a house if there had been a grown-up son; but, apart from her being a paid dependant, her very loveliness was an all-sufficient reason for secluding her in the school-room, and never permitting her to be seen by guests or visitors, especially of the male sex.

'You are Scotch?' said the young lady, abruptly and interrogatively, on the occasion of her first visit.

'Yes.'

'And yet you don't look a bit Scotch, or talk like them either.'

Alison smiled as she wondered what the young lady thought the natives of the North were like.

‘Where do your people live—in the Highlands?’

‘My family are—all dead.’

‘I see you are in mourning—all dead—everyone?’

‘Yes,’ replied Alison, curtly.

‘How funny!’

Alison stared at this peculiar remark.

‘What was that you were playing when I came in?’ asked her visitor.

‘A mazurka of Chopin’s.’

‘*Shopang*—who is he? And how well you sing, too.’

‘I am glad you think so,’ replied Alison, who sometimes accompanied herself on the old, ill-tuned, and twangling school-room piano.

‘Ma will be having you to play at her weekly receptions.’

Alison shivered at the bare idea of figuring thus among such people as were there.

‘Were you trained for the stage, or was your father a professional? of course he was.’

‘He was *not*,’ said Alison, sharply, and at this blunt remark her soft violet eyes seemed to become hard and blue as a steel sword-blade; the little colour she had died out of her face, and she looked ten years older; but her blunt visitor—she of the frizzed, sandy hair, and snub nose—mistook the cause of her emotion, and said,

‘You have had private trouble, I suppose?’

Alison was silent.

‘Tell me,’ continued the irrepressible Miss De Jobbins, ‘have you ever been in love?’

‘In truth—I have been.’

‘And your young man—he is dead, too, I suppose?’

‘He I refer to is dead, at least, to me,’ replied Alison, wearily; ‘but here come my pupils, so please to let me resume their tasks.’

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FOUR-IN-HAND CLUB.

ONE of the chief, if not the only, pleasure of Alison's life of routine was, on sunny days, to take her little charges into Kensington Gardens, and set them by the margin of the blue Round Pond, and watch its tiny fleet of toy ships skimming to and fro, with the hideous, Dutch-looking palace of Kensington as a background—a palace, the rooms of which are only remarkable for memories of William of Orange (and, let us add, of Glencoe) and Elizabeth Villiers, the hideous, one-eyed Countess of Orkney; but stately, even grand, are the avenues of old trees that grow thereby. 'How many secrets have been overheard by these ancient elms

since Heneage Finch built the boundary-fence of his pleasure ! Could their experience be set forth for the behoof of modern lovers, would they be apt,' asks a writer, 'to encourage or to warn ?'

The old palace is still there as it was when the home of the Finches, with its three irregular quadrangles, built of red brick, ornamented with columns, quoins, and cornices of indifferent stone, unchanged as when Solmes Blues mounted guard and the early Georges swore and blustered in broken English and guttural German ; but how changed are all its surroundings, for miles upon miles of streets stretch far to the westward, southward, and northward of it now.

When James VI., accustomed to old Edinburgh within its 'Flodden Wall,' was so startled with the size of the petty London of his time that, in his famous speech in the Star Chamber, in 1616, he declared that its size made it a nuisance to the nation, that

he would have all new edifices pulled down, and the builders committed to prison, he could little foresee the London of the days of steam !

And, often as she sat there under the stately trees, Alison loved to ponder over the days when the old Court suburb was remote from London, for in 1750, where now we find busy Westbourne Grove, stood a solitary house, called Western Green, three miles distant from Hyde Park ; and so lately as 1830, on the Bayswater side of the Gardens, were Kensington Gravel Pits, facing the Broad Walk, stretching away to what is now called Bayswater, which was formerly renowned for the springs and conduits for which the city was then indebted for pure water. It was famous then for its tea gardens, there called the Flora, extending the whole length of Lancaster Gate.

So, book in hand, while the children played near her on the grass, Alison would

sit in Kensington Gardens for hours lost in reverie, while the bees hummed in the hot air at the flower-beds near the Serpentine, and the sun blazed without mercy on the sheet of shining water that stretched away towards the Albert Gate ; but, when certain thoughts of the past occurred to her, there would seem no beauty in that summer scene, nor warmth even in the sunshine, for there was a dull, weary, and aching crave at her heart, with the ever-recurring question—Where was Bevil, and why did he not make an effort to seek her out ?

She knew not that the only person who could enlighten him as to her movements—the vicar of Chilcote—had steadily refused to do so.

On such occasions old Archie was generally hovering about for a sight of her ; and, if he could exchange a word with her, would steal away to his dingy lodgings ‘as happy as a king,’ to use his own phrase ; and muttering—‘The Lord will watch owre her—

the Lord will watch owre her—like ilka blade o' grass that keps its ain drap o' dew.'

One day she extended her walk beyond the boundary of the Gardens, and, crossing the bridge near the powder magazine, watched with feverish eagerness the crowds of fashionables who were gathering in their thousands there; for it was the 17th of May, when there was to be a muster of the Four-in-Hand Club, and she had a strange presentiment that she should see Bevil Goring—one of those presentiments which come unbidden to the mind, perhaps more often to the Scottish mind than any other—why or how, we know not—but which seem to speak of that which is to come as powerfully as ever did those oracles of old that whispered through the mist of Delphi, or by the black doves of Dodona; and she was not doomed to be—in one sense at least—disappointed.

Amid the fast gathering crowds and the general excitement of the scene she was

careful not to lose sight of her little charges, whose tiny hands she clasped in her own, and kept them close by her side.

She saw Cadbury ride past, accompanied by Gaskins his groom ; and, while the sight gave her a kind of shock, she shrank behind a tree lest he should perceive her, and some minutes elapsed ere she ventured from her hiding place.

Natheless his peerage, aware of his plebeian descent and certainly not distinguished appearance, instead of appearing fashionably attired like a London park rider, Cadbury affected the style of a country gentleman ; and on this day—though a most indifferent horseman—he wore Bedford cord breeches, and black polished boots, an ordinary cut-away coat buttoned over the chest, a hat rather low in the crown, and carried a light hunting whip, affecting the air of one who flew over his fences ‘like a bird’ though not unfrequently he was landed on one side, while his horse remained on

the other ; and he rode over the hounds and committed many similar unpardonable faults in the field.

At this narrowly escaped rencontre she felt her colour come and go—come and go—quickly. The man's appearance brought brought back with a rush, and vividly, a host of painful and annoying memories ; and then there was the thousand pounds cheque sent anonymously and the marble cross so mysteriously erected at her father's grave.

Oh, was she right or was she wrong in avoiding him ?

Nowhere in Europe can such a sight be seen as that presented on such a day beside the Serpentine when the meet of the Four-in-Hand Club takes place. All London seemed to be looking its brightest and best, and all London—at least, the fashionable world thereof—seemed to have found some excuse for being in the vicinity of the Serpentine Bridge and the powder magazine which stands thereby,

It was May, and the young green trees

were in full foliage, and the parterres of rhododendrons and azaleas were in bloom ; and gathering there were the beauty and fashion of the greatest city in the world, with the best horse flesh, the most accomplished drivers, and the most perfect drags, with shining panels and plated harness.

On either side of the drive all the hawthorns, pink and white, were in bloom, loading the morning air with the perfume of the almond ; and the waters of the Serpentine were seen at intervals between the flowery shrubs and long avenues of leafy trees in all the fresh greenery of May ; but as Alison looked around her she thought of Essilmont in May—Essilmont, which too probably she would never see again, with the pool in the Ythan where the Black Hound appeared when one of her race was drowned in it ; where the grey-clad angler loved to linger by the stream in the silvery morning mist ; where the black gled crowed overhead as he winged his way across the purple heather, or the cushet doo cooed with bell-like note

in the pine coppice, and the high antlers of the stag were seen as he couched amid the cool and fan-leaved bracken.

But the acclamations of the little girls who clung to her hands or skirts roused Alison from her reverie, for the procession had started, and above thirty drags, horsed magnificently, with splendid silver harness blazing in the sunshine, were getting into motion, their drivers—when not clad in the club uniform, blue, with gilded buttons—wearing accurate morning costume, while the dresses of the many ladies who crowded the lofty seats on the roof, were such as only Regent Street can furnish—and for beauty, no other city on earth could have produced such women as were seen there, in carriages or on foot.

Team after team went past, the German Ambassador with his bays, the Guards' drag, with four glossy blacks, the Hussars from Hounslow, chestnuts, greys, and roans, all criticised and critically examined by the on-lookers, and surrounded by Hyde Park in

all its glory, the route being taken from the magazine to Hyde Park corner, thence by Knightsbridge Barracks, passing the Albert Memorial, and out by the Queen's Gate, where the whole passed away like a phantasmagoria from the eyes of Alison, whose gaze followed the line of drags like one lost in a painful dream, after her heart had given the first bound of bewilderment, on seeing that the leading coach was driven by Bevil Goring !

She had seen a dashing drag drawn by a team of beautiful roans, and certainly her heart beat painfully with joy, amazement, and then with something of mortification, when she recognised in the driver thereof, 'tooling along in a most workmanlike manner,' as a bystander remarked, her *fiancé*, Bevil Goring, while on the top seats were Jerry Wilmot, Tony Dalton, young Fleming, and others of the Rifles, with Laura, and several ladies, some of whom were seated close behind Goring, and in animated conversation with him, one of them apparently a

rather flirty party, who insisted on shading his eyes sometimes with her scarlet silk parasol.

She again shrank behind a tree, as she had done when Cadbury came in sight. Her gaze, and her heart too, followed the gay drag with its roans and brilliant party going away to luncheon, no doubt at Muswell Hill, and she watched it until it disappeared.

How she got through the remainder of the day in the dull school-room on the attic floor in Pembridge Square, she scarcely knew; but the next was considerably advanced before she saw an account of the coaching meet in a fashionable paper, and read that 'Captain Goring of the Rifles' drag and team were considered by eminent connoisseurs as the most perfect in the park.' A little further on she saw that at his rooms in Piccadilly he had, after the meet, entertained a number of the club at dinner, with many persons of distinction, including H.R.H. the F.M. commanding, and one or two foreign ambassadors.

His drag and team ! What a change was here ! Poor Alison was indeed sorely bewildered ; but on reflection the change failed to give her joy. Here were evidences of great and sudden wealth, and yet he made no effort to discover her. And those ladies on the drag, who were they ; and who was she who seemed so familiar with him, and to whose playful remarks he stooped to listen from time to time ?

Alas ! it seemed as if his neglect of her was quite accounted for now. She suppressed a great desire to sob aloud, and half drew her engagement ring from her finger. Then, with true superstition of the heart, she carefully replaced it, as she did a locket which contained his likeness, and which she wore in the breast of her dress ; but the episode of that day and all it vaguely suggested added sorely to the already sufficient bitterness of the poor girl's governess life.

She knew not that though, in accordance with his recently-acquired wealth and position, his own tastes, and the wishes of friends,

Bevil had started a drag and joined the Four-in-Hand Club, he had been baffled resolutely more than once in his efforts to trace her by the well-meaning vicar of Chilcote, and that he was in perpetual anxiety to discover her, and was trusting to hope that her father's death on one hand and his own ample means had removed the barrier that the former had raised between them.

It is the fate of true love apparently never to run like a railway. 'But why that proverbial asperity should be confined to what is true we are unable to say,' writes a novelist, adding, 'For our own part, that eternal smoothness has but little charm; and the ripple which reflects sunshine and shade, bright gleams and darkening clouds in love as in Nature, gives brightness and variety to the prosiest poetry in the world.'

But doubtless Goring and Alison Cheyne were beginning to think that they had endured enough of the darkening clouds that seemed as yet without a silver lining.

CHAPTER XVII.

HUMILIATION.

HAD Goring indeed forgotten or ceased to love her? This was the ever-recurring question in the mind of Alison now, and she recalled the lines of the Spanish song, *Vanse mis amores*, as applicable to herself:

‘How could I bear—how bear disdain,
 Who not the slightest favour ever
 Received without a blush of pain;
 How could I bear disdain? O, never!
 One hour of absence, swift and brief,
 I could not bear—how should I bear
 A long and tedious age of grief,
 An age of grief, of gloom and fear?
 O! I shall die without relief,
 For I am young, and—O, sincere.’

If Goring was, as she thought bitterly

and repiningly, remiss in attempting to trace her or not caring to do so, as her heart at times began to forebode, she certainly would not and could not throw herself in his way ; she could but wait and hope, suffer and endure.

But one day she had an unexpected annoyance to encounter.

While the two little girls with the fantastic names, Irene and Iseulte, played on the grass near her in Kensington Gardens, seated under the shadow of the trees, she was reading—or trying to read, for her mind was ever preoccupied—a railway volume, she became conscious that a man was hovering near, indeed, hanging over her. She looked up and instantly recognized Sir Jasper De-horsey—or Captain Smith, as she supposed him to be—regarding her with his calm and insolent though admiring and insouciant smile. He lifted his hat, and said, with a bow,

‘I knew I was not mistaken ; there could not be another like my little runaway of Antwerp.’

Alison blushed scarlet with intense annoyance and then grew pale with alarm, she felt herself so friendless and alone. Finding her silent he spoke again.

‘We have met before—you remember me, I hope?’

‘Sir—I have no wish to remember you, and still less to renew the acquaintance,’ said Alison, quitting her seat.

‘Now, that’s too bad,’ said Dehorsey, deliberately barring her way; ‘too bad indeed. If my admiration of you——’

‘Please to remember that I cannot listen to your insolence. These children to whom I am governess——’

‘Governess—you—here is a game!’ said he, mockingly. ‘Ahoi, girls—run after this, find it and keep it?’

Taking a crown piece from his purse he spun it along the grass to some distance, and the girls rushed after it to search for and find it, a task of some difficulty.

‘Sir, sir,’ said Alison, tremulous with in-

dignation, 'you ought not to have done that.'

'Why?'

'I am the governess of these girls, and responsible for them.'

'Absurd—a governess, you! One might as well expect to see a queen or a professional beauty filling the post. Clever this governess dodge of yours,' he continued, with a kind of insolence peculiar to himself. 'I suppose these girls are your nieces—little decoy ducklings to play propriety? And how is our mutual friend, old Cad—I mean Lord Cadbury? Seen him lately? No answer? Quarrelled, I suppose—these things never last long; but you are as charming as ever. How bad of you to leave me as you did that night in the Café au Progrès!'

Alison called the children to her side and walked away. There was in her whole air and manner a conscious dignity that might have quieted the presumptuous coxcomb and *roué* who dared to address her, while afflic-

tion had touched her features with something in expression that was beyond even beauty ; but Dehorsey was one of those men who had a total disbelief in any feminine purity.

‘Where do you live, little one?’ he asked, while deliberately following her.

Alison made no reply, but looked round to see if Archie was near. He was in sight, but an appeal to him just then would have been unwise, for, old though he was, Dehorsey would have felt the full weight of his walking staff.

‘How dare you, coward that you are, to molest me thus!’ exclaimed Alison.

‘A rough word from such lips as yours,’ he said, mockingly, but changing colour nevertheless ; ‘but as an old friend——’

‘Friend!’

‘Votre pardon, mademoiselle—acquaintance then.’

Alison quitted the Gardens in haste, and hurried home with her two charges ; and

she was afterwards compelled to relinquish promenading there, one of her chief pleasures, as Dehorsey was always on the watch for her, and more than once had followed her at a little distance to the door of the house in Pembridge Square.

She was thus obliged to remain more indoors than she was wont to do; and, to add to her annoyance there, she was considerably afflicted by much more than she relished of the society of the loud and fast Miss De Jobbys; for that young lady had recently found an admirer, or—as she confidently alleged—a lover, and in her vanity and exultation was never weary of expatiating to Alison on his merits and wealth, his looks, his phrases, his dress, the ‘button-holes’ she made for him, and how she and her mamma contrived to waylay him in the park or the Row and elsewhere, to all of which Alison’s listened wearily and without interest, not even caring to inquire his name.

She had her own sad thoughts of love, and they were enough for her.

‘I should like you to see him when he comes to mamma’s weekly reception,’ continued the young lady, as she frizzed up her hair and practised *œillades* at herself in Alison’s little mirror, ‘but as a rule mamma never intrudes a governess on friends—excuse me saying so.’

‘I am aware of that,’ replied Alison, softly, and heedless of the cutting rudeness of the speech.

‘Since Miss Smythe—Smythe was here, she fancies that governesses require to be snubbed.’

‘Why?’

‘As a matter of principle, I suppose ; but, upon my soul, I think it is rather hard upon you,’ continued this slangy young person. ‘We met him at Mr. Taype the lawyer’s house, in Sussex Gardens, and, as he is rich, mamma fastened on him at once for me, don’t you know ; oh, isn’t it fun?’

‘Are you engaged then?’ asked Alison, when Miss De Jobbys had expatiated on the subject for more than half an hour.

‘Engaged—oh, no—not exactly yet—but it is only a matter of time. He showed a great desire to cultivate our family; or rather mamma determined to cultivate *him*. But, hang it all! He is very shy for an officer, and leaves me to do the spooning actually.’

‘He is in the army then?’

‘Yes; and hangs out at Aldershot.’

Alison felt her colour change at the name of that locality; but she only said,

‘Miss De Jobbys, you should not use the fast phrases you do.’

‘Well, ma uses them; ma always does.’

She did not add, that which perhaps she did not know, that her ‘ma’ had whilom been most accomplished in ‘sherry-glass flirtations’ while behind the bar at the ‘Black Swan.’

‘Isn’t spoon English?’ she asked.

‘It is slang.’

‘Is it? Well, if the verb “to spoon” is slang, I like it—that is all! But I wish I could flirt.’

‘For what purpose?’

‘To draw him on. But simply I can’t do it, he is so stand-off in his manner.’

‘Why?’

‘It is not my *forte*; I wish it was. There is Miss Le Robbynson, she can flirt with a dozen of men at once, and even make them quarrel about her.’

‘But men as a rule dislike flirts, and don’t marry them; and flirting is pretending to care for a person when you don’t.’

‘Ah; but I care a great deal for this fellow.’

‘Fellow?’ queried Alison, on whose delicate ear this girl’s phraseology jarred sorely.

‘Well, my military beau?’

‘You should not adopt this style.’

‘You are not my governess!’ retorted Miss De Jobbyns, with some asperity.

‘Some day, no doubt, I shall see your intended.’

The daughter of the house blushed with pleasure at the phrase; but thought that, with a governess so undeniably handsome, it might be better that no meeting took place as yet. Suddenly she said,

‘You have some fellow’s photo that you wear at your neck; you have it on now,’ she added, making a clutch at a ribbon which encircled the slender throat of Alison, who instinctively drew back and placed a hand upon her bosom.

‘Some fellow’s photo!—how *can* you use such a style of language?’ she asked, haughtily.

‘I have told you before that you are not *my* governess, and I won’t be lectured by you; but as for the photo——’

‘It is not a photo I wear to-day.’

‘What then?’

‘An ornament which I wear because—because——’

‘What?’ asked Miss De Jobbyns, impatiently.

‘It is the anniversary of papa’s birth.’

‘And you won’t show it to me?’

‘I have not said so,’ replied Alison, gently, as she drew up the object from her bosom. It was her father’s badge, and the badge of his father before him, as a baronet of Nova Scotia—a gold oval species of medal, bearing in a scutcheon, *argent*, a St. Andrew’s cross, *azure*, with thereon an in-scutcheon of the royal arms of Scotland, with an Imperial crown, and the motto of Henry, Duke of Rothesay, ‘*Fax mentis honestæ gloria.*’

Miss De Jobbyns, who had never seen anything of the kind before, surveyed it with equal wonder and admiration.

‘What a funny thing! I would so like to wear it at a ball to-night,’ she exclaimed.

‘Excuse me,’ replied Alison, as she replaced it in her bosom, ‘but I cannot lend it.’

‘How greedy of you! Then you will sell it, perhaps?’

‘*Sell it!*’ repeated Alison, with an inflection of voice that struck even the dull ear of the soap-boiler’s daughter. ‘Not for worlds!’

‘I thought you said that your father was dead.’

‘He is dead.’

‘Then who is that queer-looking old Scotsman whom Irene and Iseulte see speaking to you sometimes?’

‘He was my father’s faithful valet, and is now my faithful friend,’ replied Alison, with mingled hauteur and emotion.

‘Dear me! how romantic—how funny! But I suppose you will have no place now to spend your holidays in?’

‘None,’ sighed Alison, who had never thought of them till then, and she looked round the bare, bleak school-room, the scene of her daily toil, and where nearly all her time was passed now; but just then

the carriage was announced, and she was relieved of the oppressive society of the somewhat irrepressible Miss Victoria De Jobbys.

If the children talked thus of poor old Archie Auchindoir, they might speak of the insolent 'Captain Smith.' Thus she might lose her situation and be again cast on the world. Oh, how tempest-tossed was her poor little heart!

The perfect, self-posed, and ladylike manner of Alison was to a certain extent lost upon the rather rough, pampered, and hoydenish damsel who had just driven off to the Row to meet her admirer, no doubt, and who saw in her only a paid dependant, whom her mother might discard like one of the housemaids at an hour's notice or less. Her sweet nature, her natural lightness and cheerfulness, her readiness and wish to oblige, yet never intrusively in any way, were all lost on the coarse natures of those among whom her evil fortune had cast her.

She was glad that on this particular day, inspired by filial reverence, she had substituted the relic of her father for the locket which contained the photo of Bevil Goring, whose face she would have shrunk from subjecting to the off-hand criticism of the young lady who had just left her; and she was not without a stronger fear that the military lover of Miss De Jobbys—if lover he was—was the *roué* Dehorsey, who now haunted Kensington Gardens and Pembridge Square, though ‘Captain Smith’ seemed scarcely the kind of man to be captivated by the soap-boiler’s daughter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS DE JOBBYNS' ADMIRER.

‘YOU will be good enough to keep the children quiet and amused this evening, Miss Cheyne,’ said Mrs. De Jobbys, ‘as we have company coming to dinner. Also have them nicely dressed, as they may be sent for to dessert or to the drawing-room.’

Being now used to be spoken to in this style, Alison merely bowed, on which Mrs. De Jobbys said, sharply,

‘You heard me, I presume?’

‘Yes; you certainly spoke loud enough.’

Mrs. De Jobbys frowned. She would have liked her to add ‘ma’am,’ like any other paid dependant; but Alison, of course, never thought of such a thing.

‘You may withdraw now, Miss Cheyne,’ said the lady, with an assumption of would-be dignity that sat rather absurdly on the whilome dispenser of glasses of gin and bitters and pints of stout at the bar of the ‘Black Swan.’

‘Oh, Miss Cheyne, I wonder when the wedding is to be!’ exclaimed little Irene when Alison returned to the school-room.

‘Who’s wedding, dear?’ she asked.

‘Why, Vic.’s—don’t you know she is going to be married to that rich military swell?’

‘Oh, fie, Irene—you must not use such terms!’

‘Why not? I heard cook call him so when she told the tablemaid, and said we two girls would be bridesmaids.’

Intent on a book she had procured—by the way, save photographic albums in which the De Jobbys family were reproduced endlessly, there were no books in the house—Alison thought no more of the

matter ; but when evening was drawing on she heard the soft rustle of a long silken skirt, as Miss De Jobbyns, arrayed for conquest, swept in, wearing a really beautiful costume of dark blue velvet and light blue silk, smothered with cream-tinted lace.

‘He is coming—he is coming to dinner—mamma got him to promise that he would, at last!’ exclaimed the young lady, pirouetting about in the extravagance of her joy. ‘Tell me how you like my dress?’

‘It is indeed exquisite—in material,’ replied Alison, who of course had dined in the school-room with her pupils at one o’clock, and felt little or no interest to learn that Miss Victoria’s lover, or admirer, was coming to a little dinner *en famille* at seven p.m.

‘He will soon be here—how do you think I look?’ she asked for the third or fourth time.

As Alison’s delicate fingers were adjusting some parts of the lace, the sharp eyes

of Miss De Jobbyns observed—as they had often done before—the ring, the engagement ring, which the former had received from *her* lover, under the whispering beeches, one evening.

‘It is very beautiful, and must be valuable,’ said Miss De Jobbyns, examining it closely.

‘It *is* valuable.’

‘Too much so, I think, for—for one teaching to wear.’

‘When it was given to me, teaching was not thought of,’ said Alison, in a low, sad voice.

‘I have no end of lovely rings; but,’ urged the girl, who was by nature covetous, ‘you might lend it to me, just for to-night, though you wouldn’t lend that funny ornament for the Le Robbynson’s ball.’

‘Excuse me,’ replied Alison, coldly, ‘it never leaves my finger.’

‘Not even when you wash your hands?’

‘Not even then.’

'You will spoil these beautiful stones.'

'It shall never be seen on another hand while I live.'

'Indeed,' sneered Miss De Jobbys; 'and thereby hangs a tale, I suppose. Upon my Sam you are very romantic! Of course you got it from the fellow whose photo you wear, but will let no one see?'

Alison made no reply, but her colour came and went with annoyance at the girl's brusquerie; and the latter began to chant the praises of her admirer, a subject of which her listener was utterly weary.

'He has we don't know how many thousands a year—think of that; oh my! Talking of love, I heard him say laughingly to mamma, who was chaffing him on the subject, that he would not be in love with anyone again.'

'And what of that?'

'He meant, of course, with anyone again but *me*.'

'How do you construe his remark thus?'

‘Because his eyes met mine as he said so; and I do hope I blushed—I am sure I did.’

‘And he is rich, you say?’

‘Yes, rich enough to satisfy even mamma.’

‘That is fortunate,’ replied Alison, with a sigh, as she recalled her father’s bitter opposition to her own engagement, and all the wiles and worry of Cadbury.

‘Fortunate indeed; but there is about Bevil——’

‘BEVIL!’ exclaimed Alison, startled by the uncommon name.

‘Don’t snap me up so! Yes, Bevil is his name—sweetly pretty I think it—Bevil Goring.’

‘And he is rich, you say?’

‘Yes; has twenty or thirty thousand a year at least.’

It cannot be the same, though the conjunction of name is very singular, said Alison in her agitated heart.

‘Is he a merchant,’ she asked, ‘a city man?’

‘City be hanged!’ responded this im-

pulsive young woman. 'He is an officer—a Captain in the Rifle Brigade, and, when not in town, hangs out at Aldershot. But there is a carriage; the people are arriving, and I must be off.'

She quickly withdrew, leaving Alison pale as a corpse, trembling in every limb, and rooted to the spot, propping herself by a hand on the table, till she sank into a chair, oblivious of the wonder with which the two little girls regarded her sudden, and, to them, unaccountable emotion.

For some time her thoughts were terrible. She recalled the drag alleged by the public prints to be Goring's—the entertainment, given even to royalty, at 'his rooms in Piccadilly,' all evidences of wealth that must have come to him since the time she was decoyed to the Continent, and in the fact of that wealth—the absence of which was the cause of her father's hostility to the last hour of his life—this girl's remarks now confirmed her!

That Bevil Goring could love or even admire such a girl—a man so refined and delicate in taste and ideas—she never for a moment imagined ; but what did the whole situation and that girl's boastful allegations mean? How came he to know such people, despite their great wealth, and permit them to cultivate his acquaintance? Yet matters seemed to have progressed so far that even the servants were canvassing the prospects of a *wedding* !

More than all, why, oh why had he never attempted to discover her, to trace her out, in these her days of poverty and sore trial !

The magnitude and the multitude of her thoughts overwhelmed her ; among these were emotions of sharp but just pride, keen disappointment, bitterest doubt, and agonising mortification ; but her tears—usually so ready to flow—came not to relieve her now, and she was only roused from a kind of feverish stupefaction by the entrance of a servant to light the candles, and conduct ‘ the young ladies downstairs to dessert,’ an

invitation to which they responded with instant alacrity.

Stooping over the stair-bannister, she heard *his* voice once or twice as the male guests filed off to the drawing-room after the ladies, and it thrilled through her heart. A choking lump rose in her throat, but still not a tear would come.

After a time she was roused by some one addressing her. It was a servant, by nature saucy, under-bred, illiterate, and disposed to be impertinent in general when she could be so with impunity.

‘Were you addressing me?’ asked Alison.

‘Yes; the missus says as you are to tittivate yourself a bit and come down to the drawing-room.’

‘I am to—*what*?’ asked Alison, sharply—for her at least.

‘Tittivate yourself—it is Henglish; but, bein’ Scotch, perhaps you don’t know what it means.’

‘I am not going to the—drawing-room to-night.’

‘You won’t obey the missus?’ exclaimed the servant, aghast.

‘Certainly not in this instance.’

‘Don’t you know your place? You are honly a guv’ness, and guv’nesses ain’t ladies, whatever they may think.’

‘What are they?’

‘Mock ones.’

‘Leave the room instantly—or——’

‘Or what?’ asked the girl, sharply.

‘I’ll get you turned out of the house.’

The girl withdrew uttering as Parthian shots some remarks about ‘hupstarts hor-dering their betters about.’

In a few minutes Miss De Jobbyns, with some irritation of manner, appeared to prefer the same request, adding that she was wanted for a hand at whist.

‘To come down to play whist? Is not this an unusual condescension?’ asked Alison.

‘Yes,’ was the cool response; ‘ma thinks it part of your duty to make yourself generally useful; and, I suppose, you can play whist?’

The girl was too underbred to be aware how heartless was the *sang froid*, in which she suggested, or commanded, that Alison should make herself useful.

‘I would rather be excused.’

‘But ma says you must!’

‘Must—why?’

‘A hand is wanted at the whist table, and I want Bevil at the piano, all to myself.’

‘It is utterly impossible. I have a headache,’ replied Alison, goaded to desperation.

‘Bother your headache!’ was the elegant response; ‘try *sal volatile*, Rimmel’s vinegar, anything, but come.’

However, Alison remained inflexible, and so far from making herself ‘useful’ to either Mrs. De Jobbyns and her daughter, by appearing in their circle downstairs, she retired to bed—to think and weep—but not to sleep.

The vicar of Chilcote was, she knew, in town, and to him she would appeal to procure her another home, where she would hear the name of Bevil Goring no more!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FORECLOSURE EFFECTED.

WHILE Dalton, under Laura's care and nursing, had been fast recovering health and strength, on leave of absence, at Chilcote Grange; and Jerry Wilmot, though less tenderly cared for at Wilmothurst, surrounded as he was then by every luxury and comfort still, was also fast learning to forget all he had endured in Ashanti, and all the natural buoyancy of his spirits was returning, Lady Julia was as full of unspeakable animosity at Mr. Chevenix as the languid character of her aristocratic nature would permit her to be.

A regular breach had replaced the cool indifference with which she had viewed that

personage. In the profundity of his plebeian insolence he had at last taken full measures to obtain the interest on his mortgages, and more, he had foreclosed them, and ruin now awaited the house of Wilmot!

And again and again, while tenderly carressing Flossie, or having her long tresses brushed out by Mademoiselle Florine, she languidly bewailed to Cousin Emily, or to Jerry, who lingered near her with the cigar in hand he dared not light in her presence, that 'the artful pillager of the Wilmot estates would drive her to a beggar's grave in a foreign land.'

Though Jerry thought life was too short 'for all this sort of thing,' and was making up his mind to 'cut the whole thing' and go to India, he was still on friendly terms with old Mr. Chevenix, but nevertheless was greatly ruffled by stories that reached him of Lord Twiseldown's attention to Bella, and was once, as he phrased it, 'awfully cut up,' when coming upon them riding together

without even a groom in attendance, and nearly overtook them in a green lane—yea, would have done so, had he not timely drawn the bridle of his own horse.

They had been laughing and talking amicably—certainly more like friends, it would seem, than lovers, as gossip averred them to be; and with aching heart, and eager and admiring eyes, poor Jerry Wilmot—poor in more ways than one, for he was a ruined man now—observed the air and bearing of the handsome girl, in her dark blue riding habit—a costume so fitted for the display of every womanly grace—while from her slender waist she moved with every movement of her horse, the very action of which seemed to assert that he was proud of having such a rider.

Still more was Jerry ‘cut up’ and then perplexed when, soon after, he met Mr. Chevenix, who, with a twinkle in his eye—whether of pride or mischief the said Jerry failed to detect—informed him, somewhat

unnecessarily as he thought, that Lord Twiseldown had proposed to Bella.

‘Proposed!’ repeated Jerry, in a rather breathless voice.

‘Yes.’

‘And when does the—the marriage come off?’

‘It won’t come off at all.’

‘Why?’

‘She has refused him.’

‘Refused him!’

‘Yes; odd, isn’t it? Can’t make Bella out at all,’ replied Mr. Chevenix, as he nodded, smiled, and trotted away on his cob.

Jerry was, we say, perplexed on hearing of this. Bella’s refusal of Twiseldown’s hand delighted him greatly, but was it born of regard for himself or regard for someone else? He had not gone near her for some time past, and knew not how many might have been hovering about her, now that, with all her beauty and brilliance apart, she was known as the virtual heiress of Wilmothurst.

It filled him with many thoughts that were difficult of arrangement and of analysis. He resolved to pay her a farewell visit anyway, and told his lady mother that he would do so.

‘That girl again!’ said Lady Julia, as he rode off. ‘I did not think that he had actually involved himself with her.’

‘Nor has he, perhaps, auntie,’ sighed Cousin Emily, though her heart made her suspect otherwise.

‘I believe Jerry to be, like many young men of the present day,’ resumed Lady Julia, still obtuse as to the new situation, ‘one of those who think they can—especially with a girl of her position in society—go to the utmost confines of love-making—can look, say, and do what they please, and yet do and say nothing that will quite compromise them, or involve their honour; and girls such as the Chevenix quite understand the matter. But that there should be more in it passes my comprehension, and yours too,

darling Flossie,' she added, taking the cur out of its mother-of-pearl basket and kissing its nose tenderly.

She spoke, as usual, languidly and softly, for she was ever one of those who deem that 'feeling, or any betrayal of it, is a sure sign of an ill-bred person'—bad form, in short.

Meanwhile Jerry was *tête-à-tête* with Bella Chevenix in her pretty little drawing-room overlooking the ivy-clad church and the village green.

Jerry was rather grave, for Bella had been piqued by his absence, and received him, he thought, rather coldly, which led him to fear there 'was some other fellow in the field;' but anon Bella began to rally him, for she could not but remember that the letter he had written on the night before Coomassie was entered, amounted quite to a declaration.

'I begin to sicken of the world and all its bitterness, Bella,' said he, a little irrelevantly, on which she sang, softly,

‘ Oh, what shall I be at fifty,
If I am then alive,
If I find the world so bitter
When I am barely twenty-five ?’

‘ I wonder if you will be so merry when we meet again, years hence, if ever,’ said Jerry, almost angrily.

‘ Years hence—what do you mean, Jerry—for I must call you Jerry as of old, if you adopt this tone ?’ said she, regarding his now grave face attentively.

‘ I go to the Horse Guards to-morrow to arrange about an exchange for India.’

‘ Why ?’

‘ Can you ask—when you know that I am a ruined and beggared man ?’

He was looking doggedly out of the window, and did not see how her sensitive lips quivered, and how her shapely bodice was heaving with the painful pulsations of her warm and affectionate heart; for Bella—impulsive Bella—felt that if she said only a little more she must break down altogether; and the muscles of her slender throat ached

with the efforts she made to keep back her desire to weep.

‘Ruined—Jerry—you?’ she said, after a pause.

‘You know how, and why; the past is over—at an end, and for ever; but do think of me kindly, Bella, when I am far away from you—for my own kindred are few and cold—yea, seem to have little heart for me.’

‘Jerry, dear Jerry,’ said the girl, in a low voice, ‘ere this, I thought you would have asked me to marry—to—to marry you.’

‘I dared not, Bella.’

‘Why?’

‘Lest you might misunderstand me.’

‘But you—you love me?’

‘God alone knows how well!’

‘Then, Jerry, will *you* marry me?’ she said, while her sweet voice sank into a pleading whisper; ‘I have always loved you.’

Jerry caught her wildly in his arms.

‘Bella—my wife—my own little wife at

last!’ exclaimed Jerry, in a rather broken voice, as they kissed each other solemnly and passionately, for all doubts between them were ended now.

‘Oh, Bella darling,’ said Jerry, after sundry incoherences had been indulged in, ‘though far, far away from you, I often dreamed of such an hour as this—for I was always with you in the spirit.’

‘I would rather have had you, as I have you now, you dear, provoking old Jerry, in the flesh,’ replied Bella, with one of her arch and waggish smiles. ‘It is much more satisfactory.’

So Wilmothurst would return to the old line again, in all its vast extent of fertile acreage, and with the latter would come a bride second to none in brilliance and beauty that had ever come there before, though not—like haughty Lady Julia, the daughter of ever so many earls—but of a hale, stout, and warm-hearted old fellow, who loved

Jerry as his own son—though, sooth to say, we fear he will never be able to abide his mother, who eventually took up her abode, in sullen and stately grandeur, with Cousin Emily, at the restored Dower House in Langley Park.

So Jerry did not go up to the Horse Guards after all, but quietly and rapidly set about the arrangements for his marriage, which was very soon to come about; and, meanwhile, as may be supposed, he spent every spare hour—and he had a good many of them—with Bella.

‘The joy of my life is a *tête-à-tête* with you, dearest Bella,’ said Jerry, as he lay on the grass at her feet one evening smoking his brier-root. ‘My lady mother’s manner is so cold and stately that she quite thrusts all a poor fellow’s heart back upon himself. By Jove, you should have seen her mode of welcoming me home after our shindy in Ashanti! I would have preferred less etiquette and more love; some of the kiss-

ing and clinging some of our poor fellows, like Tony Dalton, received on the day we landed at Portsmouth.'

'Poor Jerry! you will never want for kisses now,' said Bella, laughingly.

'By-the-by, I have a letter from Goring, who is again in town, and cutting quite a figure, I hear, in the world of fashion.'

'Has he heard aught yet of Miss Cheyne, poor girl?' asked Bella, who naturally took a deep interest in all love affairs, especially just then.

'He says that he has not. Here is his epistle; but that he is bored to death by a soap-boiler's widow and her daughter, an absurd couple, whom, for his sins, he met at the house of Taype, his solicitor, and who have made a dead set at him—waylay him in the park with their carriage, haunt the vicinity of his club, and pester him with invitations.

'“They are shameless in their mode of teasing me, these devilish women,” he con-

tinues, "and seem to possess the power of ubiquity, and bid fair to run me to earth. I must either cut them or hook it, and come back to the camp." Only fancy, Bella, what odd creatures they must be.'

'But everyone has not the wealth and handsome person of Captain Goring.'

'Yes ; and Bevil is one of the right good sort.'

So there were two sides to the picture drawn by the fervid fancy or vanity of Miss Victoria De Jobbys ; and Alison Cheyne, had she known all, need not have wept so bitterly far into the hours of the night, as related.

CHAPTER XX.

HOMELESS.

WITH Alison events were fated to follow each other fast now.

On the day subsequent to the dinner-party at Pembridge Square she felt too ill to leave her bed till the afternoon was well advanced. She was, however, visited by Miss De Jobbyns, who gave her a very inflated account of Goring's attentions to herself, how she completely 'snuffed out the three Le Robbynson girls,' and gave him credit for many flattering, and certainly peculiar, utterances that Alison thought very unlike the Goring that she knew. Still she was painfully uncertain what to think, and was very glad when her garru-

lous visitor, after readjusting her frizzled hair in the mirror and inspecting the few trifles that lay on the toilet-table, took her departure.

Alison, we have said, could not throw herself in Goring's way; her pride and delicacy, all love apart, revolted at the idea; and she now actually trembled lest the chance mention of her not very common name by any of the De Jobbys' family might lead to the discovery of her identity in her present humble position.

And now a letter, on the envelope of which a coronet figured, was, after being long inspected, and the cause of much surmise by Mrs. and Miss De Jobbys, handed to her by a servant. She opened it and read. It would seem that, though Bevil Goring had failed to obtain from the vicar of Chilcote the London address of Alison and a clue to her circumstances, the 'Right Honourable Lord Cadbury' had succeeded in obtaining both, in virtue of his rank, we

presume; and the result was this letter, most subtly and cunningly worded, and dated not from his club or from Cadbury Court, but from the villa of his 'lady friend' at St. John's Wood, offering her a home *there*, and containing what she conceived at first to be another offer of marriage; but, on re-reading it, the real meaning of and nature of the document came before her, in all its insulting form and truth, as it fell from her hand ere she tore it into minute fragments with trembling fingers. She grew deadly pale, but her lips became firm and set; her bosom heaved, and all the purity of her nature, her pride of old position and race, *l'esprit de famille* which her father had inculcated rose within her, she covered her face with her hands as if to thrust back her tears, and exclaimed, in a low voice,

'Oh, papa, papa! It wanted but this insult to complete the humiliation of my life!'

So the parvenu peer sought—but in vain

—to put a keystone to the edifice of his own innate rascality.

At last she rose from her bed and proceeded to dress herself with the intention of visiting the vicar without delay to beseech him to find her another home; but—on looking about her toilet-table, where she had certainly left it over night—she missed her locket—the locket with the likeness of Bevil in it!

She instituted a strict if hurried search over all her little room, but no trace of it could be found.

The servant who had brought breakfast to her on a covered salver had never approached the toilet-table she was certain; but Miss De Jobbys had, as she remembered, lingered before the mirror, and trifled with the little etceteras that lay thereby.

Could she be the abstractor, the delinquent, the thief?

Impossible! Yet Alison had barely completed attiring herself for the street,

with the intention of asking permission to go out for a little time, when a maid appeared, sent by Mrs. De Jobbyns, to request her presence in the drawing-room.

‘In the drawing-room,’ thought Alison; ‘what does that import?’

On entering, the first object that caught her eye was her locket in that lady’s hand, and she had a perfect conviction that the latter and her daughter were inflamed with keen resentment.

‘Jealousy,’ we are told, ‘smacks of low life and the drama.’ Be that as it may, Alison was now fated to a sample thereof.

‘Is this your property, Miss Cheyne?’ asked Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbyns, frigidly, yet tremulous with passion.

‘It is; and how came it in your possession, I demand?’ exclaimed Alison.

‘You demand?’

‘Yes.’

‘That matters little.’

‘It matters very much indeed,’ said Ali-

son, her spirit rising to the occasion ; ‘ a theft has been committed, else my locket would have been where I left it, on my toilet-table.’

‘ Do not attempt to bandy words with me,’ said the lady of the mansion, assuming a bullying tone. ‘ But how is it that the likeness of a friend of this family—of a gentleman visitor—a stranger to a person in your position, of course—is in your possession ?’

‘ And how do you dare to wear it ?’ added Miss De Jobbys, in a shrill voice of passion, as her mother tossed the locket to the feet of Alison, who regained it, and deliberately placed it in the bosom of her dress.

‘ What would he—what must *we*—think of you ?’ asked Mrs. De Jobbys, in a louder key.

Alison disdained to make any reply.

‘ You are unfit to teach my darlings—if you have not corrupted their angel minds

already—and I request you to quit Pembroke Square at once. The housekeeper will give you what is due in lieu of a month's notice.'

Alison had not been unprepared for this dictum. She had heard it without a shock, and, though certainly dismayed by the sudden turn her affairs had taken, at once prepared for and took her departure.

She kissed and bade adieu to her two little pupils, Irene and Iseulte, whose names had no doubt been suggested by the *London Journal*—a periodical much affected by Mrs. Slumpkin De Jobbys in her youth, and then drove away.

The daughter of the house, enraged and bewildered, knew not precisely *what* to think of the affair, but she had a gloomy fear that so far as Bevil Goring was concerned her hopes were vanishing into thin air, or on the eve of being shattered like the crystal in the basket of Alnaschar, of whom no doubt she never heard.

As the cab quitted the square, Alison shrank back on perceiving Sir Jasper De-horsey (or 'Captain Smith,' as she supposed him to be) ambling his horse slowly along, and watching—as she had before known him to do—the windows of the house she had just quitted for ever; and this incident, with the memory of Cadbury's cruel and cowardly letter, filled her heart with horror, bitterness, and dismay. She felt so well-nigh penniless and helpless, too.

The summer sunshine was in all its brightness and glory, but Alison felt as if a mist surrounded her, and as if the surging of great waters was in her ears, and she feared that she might faint.

Almost at the same moment she quitted Pembridge Square, Bevil Goring entered it to leave his card, like a well-bred man, on the De Jobbyns family, whom he devoutly hoped to find 'not at home.' Indeed, he selected the time when he knew that the

mother and daughter were generally 'hair-ing' themselves, as they called it, in the Row, and as he drew near the house he came suddenly upon a well-known form and figure.

'What, Archie! faithful old Archie Auchindoir—you here!' he exclaimed, as he shook the old man's hand with ardour. 'Can it be you?'

'By my certie it is, sir,' replied Archie, 'and pleased I am to see a kent face in this unco human wilderness o' brick wa's.'

'And what are you doing here now that poor Sir Ranald is dead?'

'Just what he wad hae dune—watching owre missie, sir.'

'And where is she, Archie—where is she?'

'Where her forbears wad little like to see her.'

'How—where—what?' asked Goring, impetuously.

'Governess to some brats in the square up bye.'

‘What square?’

‘Paimbrig Square,’ replied Archie, adapting the name to his own vernacular.

‘And whose children?’

‘A Mrs. De Jobbyns she ca’s hersel,’ replied Archie, with a contemptuous smirk on his wrinkled visage.

‘My God!’ exclaimed Goring, growing red and pale alternately; ‘my darling reduced to this, and all unknown to me! When came this about?’

‘A week or two after the master gaed to his lang hame, sir. Puir Sir Ranald!’ said Archie, with a break in his voice; ‘after a’ he had possest and tint, a kist and a sheet was a’ he needed in the lang rin.’

‘And you have been watching over her, you say?’ asked Goring, again taking the old man’s hand in his own.

‘I had a wee pickle siller saved, and I thought—I thought—but never mind; a’ the men in the Mearns can do nae mair than they may.’

‘And she is in Pembridge Square now?’

‘Yes, sir.’

He slipped a card with his address into Archie’s hand, and hurried to the house, where the startling ring he gave the bell brought an indignant housemaid to the door speedily as a genii of the Lamp.

‘Mrs. and Miss De Jobbyns,’ she answered, ‘*was* not at home, having just driven off to the park.’

‘Thank heaven!—and Miss Cheyne!’

‘The governess?’

‘Yes—yes—is she at home?’

He was rather curtly informed that she had been dismissed from her ‘sitivation,’ and with her trunk had left the house a short time ago.

‘Dismissed and gone—where?’

‘No one in the house knew.’

He turned away in great agony of mind; and he had in his haste forgotten to ask Archie where *he* lived. He looked about

him in every direction, but the old man was nowhere to be seen.

And so she would be utterly homeless now.

Homeless, and in London—and she so young, so tender, and beautiful!

Alas! more evils than ever the fatal Black Hound of Essilmont forebode might be in store for his Alison now.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

SO she was out in the world once more, with apparently no earthly tie to bind her to it.

‘Could I but see Bevil’s face once more and then die!’ was her thought, as, blinded with the hot tears that flowed under her veil, she was driven through the sunny and crowded streets of pleasant Bayswater.

We have said that the vicar of Chilcote was now in town; he had brought his family with him, and was residing in private apartments not far from Pembridge Square, and overlooking Kensington Gardens. Thus, Alison’s first thoughts—indeed her only re-

source—was to throw herself upon him as she had before intended ; but now she was terrified that, if he naturally made inquiries of Mrs. De Jobbys, in the spirit of sourness or malevolence she might give a very distorted account of the late episode ; and, indeed, the worthy old man was greatly disturbed when she told him her simple tale, as the same ideas occurred to himself, and he saw all the peril of giving the name of that irate matron as a reference to anyone else ; and thus for two entire days he remained in sore perplexity what to do.

On the third he began again to question Alison, whom he kept with his family.

‘And the portrait which caused this grotesque disturbance—the portrait of this gentleman is that of your *fiancé*?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Were you engaged to him with your father’s consent?’ asked he, suspiciously, while he regarded her keenly, but not unkindly, under his shaggy, white eyebrows.

‘No—to my sorrow be it said,’ replied Alison, with a little hesitation.

‘That seems wrong—why?’

‘He was not rich enough then to suit papa’s views, having little more than his pay.’

‘*Then*--is he rich now?’

‘Yes—more than rich—even wealthy.’

‘And has he since sought you out?’

‘No,’ sobbed Alison.

The vicar shook his white head and groaned.

‘What is his name?’ he asked, and Alison told him.

‘Goring—Goring,’ said he, pulling his nether lip thoughtfully; ‘I have heard the name. He called on me more than once to ask your London address, as also did Lord Cadbury of Cadbury Court; but suspecting his object, I declined to give it.’

‘Oh, why?’

‘He is an officer—and officers are often wild and unscrupulous fellows. You are

young, more than most attractive, and are without a protector—you understand ?’

‘Oh, sir, how you have wronged him !’

‘I am sorry you think so, but——’

‘Good heavens, you may have parted me and Bevil for ever!’ she exclaimed, in a voice of intense pathos and sorrow.

‘Not so, my darling—I am here!’ said Bevil Goring, who had entered unannounced by the boarding-house servant, and in a moment his arms were round her and her head upon his breast.

The darkest hour is always that before the dawn, it is said, even as clouds are a prelude to sunshine.

It is chiefly in novels and on the stage, but seldom in real life, that people start and scream, or faint and fall; so Alison, on finding herself suddenly face to face with the object of all her dearest and tenderest thoughts, felt only her colour change and her heart give a kind of leap within her breast; while power so completely seemed to

leave her limbs for some moments that she would have slid on the carpet but for the support of Bevil's caressing arms, and for more than a minute neither spoke, for great emotion induces silence.

So she remained folded in his close embrace—content, safe in the shelter of his arms, with her white face nestling on his breast, while he showered kisses upon it and her hair.

‘Captain Goring,’ said the vicar, ‘how did you discover that she was here—with me?’

‘She wrote to her old servant whither she had gone, and he informed me without delay at my club. He did not distrust me, as you, sir, did.’

‘I trust, Captain Goring, you will pardon that now, “as all is well that ends well,”’ replied the vicar, with a smile, and thinking, wisely, that he might be rather *de trop* just then, he withdrew to another apartment.

Goring now then held her at arm's length to survey her face, it was so long since he

had last looked upon it, and then drew her close again to his breast. After a time, he asked,

‘What is all this that I have been told about your being a governess—Alison, love, tell me?’

‘I am one now—at least, I was one, in a house in Pembridge Square.’

‘With a family called De Jobbyns—absurd name!’

‘Yes.’

‘Is this a riddle—a joke, or what?’ said he, giving his moustache an almost angry twitch.

‘No riddle or joke,’ replied Alison, sweetly. ‘I seemed to have no friend in the world to aid me, and I had my bread to earn.’

‘My poor darling!’

‘Yes—poor indeed.’

‘And you have left that woman?’

‘No.’

‘How?’

‘She dismissed me bluntly and coarsely.’

‘Why?’ asked Goring, striking the floor with his spurred heel.

‘I was dismissed with a month’s salary, because I had been detected wearing your likeness—here, in my locket.’

A smile that rippled into a laugh spread over the face of Goring, who, recalling the mode in which he had been hunted by mother and daughter, took in the whole situation.

Calm speech and connected utterance came now to both, and many mutual explanations were made, and mutual tender assurances given more than once; for both had much to relate and to hear; nor with both—Alison especially—without false impressions that required removal.

‘And *you* were actually in Antwerp too!’ exclaimed Alison, when she heard his story.

‘I traced you there, only to lose you again—though many times I must have passed the door of the very place where

you lay ill. Oh, my darling, what you must have endured !'

Her transitory emotions of gratitude to Cadbury for his supposed birthday gift made Goring laugh again when he saw her wonder and joy that it had come from himself, and that she learned the erector of the marble cross was himself also. Thus, when Bevil felt her tears and kisses on his cheek, he thought that never were gifts so pleasantly repaid. With Alison, it would all be rest hereafter. 'Trials and troubles might come,' as a writer has it; though further trials and troubles seemed at a low computation just then; 'but nothing would tear her great tree up by the roots again.'

Alison felt just a little emotion of shame, and that she kept to herself. He had never, even for an instant, doubted her love (though he had feared her father's influence), but she had not been without twinges of doubt, especially after the day of the Four-in-Hand meeting by the Serpentine.

‘How trivial, at first, seem the events that rule our lives—that shape our destinies—our future,’ said Goring. ‘Had I not, by the merest chance, met poor old Archie, heaven alone knows when I might have traced you.’

Hour after hour passed by, and she forgot all about the vicar, and even of where they were.

She would recal the past time at Chilcote, when the first vague emotion of happiness in his presence and his society—pleasure that was almost, strange to say, a kind of sweet pain—stole over her; when she was half-afraid to meet his eye, and when each stolen glance at the other led to much secret perturbation of spirit, and when a touch of the hand seemed to reveal something that was new, as the glamour of a first love stole into the hearts of both.

How long, long ago, seemed that day on which they rode with the buckhounds, and took their fences together side by side.

We have not much more to relate, as in a little time they were to glide pleasantly away into the unnoticed mass of married folks; yet to Alison it would be always delightful to think that she had, at her will and bidding, a fine manly fellow like Bevil Goring—one whom brave men had been proud to follow—for she had a keen appreciation of soldierly renown; and he had more than a paragraph to his name in the Annual Army List.

We have said, we think, in a preceding chapter that he wrote to his solicitors at Gray's Inn an important letter concerning the acquisition of certain property at Chilcote; thus when he took Archie Auchindoir into his service as a personal valet (which he did forthwith), great was the astonishment of the old man on first entering his master's rooms in Piccadilly at what he saw there, and a cry of joy escaped him and he almost wept.

There hung all the old family pictures,

and there were many a relic and chattel dearly prized by Sir Ranald and Alison too, in that superstition of the heart, which few sensitive or affectionate natures are without.

There on the sideboard was the great silver tankard, the gift of Queen Elizabeth—the Bride of the Bruce—filled with red wine and emptied on hundreds of occasions by many successions of Cheynes, even after the 24th of June, 1314, was nigh forgotten, and above it hung the portraits of the two pale, haughty, yet dashing and noble-looking cavalier brothers, with their love-locks and long rapiers, who fell in battle for the King of Scotland, and Archie, greeting them as old friends, passed his shrivelled hands tenderly and caressingly over the unconscious canvas, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

‘A’ for her, a’ for her—God bless him!’ he muttered, knowing well why Goring had rescued these objects from Sir Ranald’s creditors.

In Piccadilly, Archie, though rather a puzzle to Goring's other servants—his grooms, coachman, and so forth—found himself 'in clover;' and, till the marriage came off, Alison was to remain with the family of the vicar, who was to perform the ceremony, at which little Netty Dalton figured as a bridesmaid.

After all she had undergone, and had feared she might yet have to undergo, she was again with Goring—his strong arms round her, his lips upon her cheek and brow!

She was at times confused, bewildered—unable to comprehend it all. She could but lay her head upon his breast and resign herself to the rapture of the occasion, and close her eyes as if it would be happiness even if she opened them no more.

How joyous was that mute embrace—that love-making without words—the spell that neither knew how—or wished—to break! All her past woes, and all her future hopes,

seemed merged in the joy of the present time; while the pressure of Bevil's hand, his impassioned murmur, his fond gaze and studious tenderness, his attention to every wish and want, caused a sense of joy in her soul of which it had never been conscious before.

As Jerry said, in his off-hand way, when he visited them, like Bella and himself, 'they were in a high state of sentimental gush.'

Now she knew that she belonged to Goring, and he to her, and that the life and love of each belonged to each other, that they would be always together till death—a distant event, let us hope—parted them; that his handsome face would never smile on another woman as it smiled on her; and that no other woman's lips would be touched by him as hers had been on the day she ceased to be Alison Cheyne of Essilmont and that ilk.

THE END.

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